

Teen school trustee, journalist has high aspirations

BY ALI RAZA
aliraza@yrmg.com

He's journalist, a broadcaster, a school board trustee — and he's only 16.

Stouffville teen and St. Brother André Catholic High School student Ben Smith sure doesn't sound like your average teen who's drowning in Snapchat or Pokémon GO. Only halfway through high school, Smith has already built an impressive portfolio and resume that covers leadership development and his own career aspirations.

"I have some great mentors, have met some great people and it's afforded me a lot of opportunities," Smith said.

In April 2015, Smith was elected as a junior student trustee for the York Catholic District School Board. He shares the responsibility of representing 5,500 students across the region with his senior trustee Nicolas Bottger.

The board elects junior trustees every year, with the previous junior trustee taking over the role of senior trustee upon each election. Smith is learning the ropes at the board in his first year.

"It's a bit of a learning curve," he said. "We talk to students all the

time, participate in a lot of really special things. There's some great professional development as trustees and leaders in general."

Smith is also an executive on the Ontario Student Trustees' Association.

When asked why he decided to take on the responsibility of representing his fellow students, Smith said he wanted to bring "real meaningful change" to the student voice.

"I don't think most students realize, but they have as much a right and voice as any other group in the education system," he said. "I wanted to go about bringing positive change by giving people a voice, raising their concerns, no matter how big or small."

Smith had planned to run for student trustee since Grade 9, giving him ample time to prepare.

But before his foray into politics, Smith was been broadcasting and writing from the age of 10.

"I started with WhiStle Radio in December 2012," he said. "I was doing PA announcing for a few minor hockey teams in Stouffville. I was terrible at the beginning, but you learn quickly how to bring the game to the listener."

Ben serves as WhiStle Radio's

live hockey broadcaster as well as a host for his show Along The Boards.

He writes for the Canadian Women's Hockey League, SB Nation and HockeyNow magazine.

With his growing experience, Smith is looking to go to Ryerson University's RTA School of Media or Carleton University's journalism program.

"It's a bit of a dilemma," he said. "Maybe the student trustee thing will make me want to do political science. But journalism or communications is really the field I want to go into."

Regarding the current state of journalism, Smith said he's not worried.

"Wild career paths are fun," he said. "Media's been taking a hit lately with job losses, we hear about journalists getting fired, but we don't hear about the ones chasing stories and I think that needs to be celebrated."

Smith said his family and friends have been a major support in all his endeavours, but his teachers have also helped.

"I've been lucky to have some amazing teachers between St. Brigid and St. Brother André," he said.



Steve Somerville/Metroland

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