

REFLECTIONS

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Letter from the Managing Editor



Dear alumni,

It has been my pleasure to work with a group of brilliant minds to help highlight remarkable stories from our Durham College community.

As we embark on the next chapter of our lives and enter the workforce, it's been truly inspiring to hear from alumni about their success. As emerging PR professionals, we've been able to participate in countless initiatives, especially for Reflections, where we had the opportunity to interview, network and write stories. I would like to express my gratitude to our professors,

staff and administrators, who have guided us throughout our academic journey.

In this issue, we've covered many inspiring stories of our alumni members who are leading the way in their respective fields. During this process, we've learned valuable lessons about resilience, perseverance, and the importance of supporting each other. We're now on the verge of graduating to join our fellow alumni, and we couldn't be prouder to be a part of the DC community. We are beyond grateful and humbled by this experience. Your achievements inspire us to keep striving for

excellence and to make a positive impact in the world.

On behalf of the management team of this issue of Reflections, we thank you for your continuous support and hope you enjoy Issue 102 of our publication.

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For the love of sport

By Sian Carroll

Olivia Oldfield knew she loved the Olympics from a young age. Working for Team Canada at the Olympics sounded like a faraway dream for her, until she stood on top of the alpine slopes at Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games as a mission team member.

Olivia Oldfield found her calling through her upbringing. Her parents encouraged the aspect of sports, working in athletic fields; sport rehabilitation physiotherapy and football coaching, and thereby enrolled her in whatever she found fit for herself. Whether it was basketball, wrestling, soccer, volleyball, dance, or gymnastics; you name it. Her first memory of truly loving the idea of sports was watching the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics, and how it was able to bring families and the country together with pride.

Oldfield acquired her BA from the University of Ottawa in political science, English and history in 2019. She thought about what to do following her degree, and was asked if there

was anywhere she could work where her dreams would truly flourish. Oldfield replied, "I want to work for team Canada one day." She said this thinking it was a long shot, and that in 40 years it could possibly happen. However, Oldfield used this as her focus.

"I knew that there would be a point in my life, no matter what, that I would connect both my personal love and professional love and work in sport," she said.

Oldfield applied to Durham College's PR & Strategic Communications program for the 2018 school year and knew right away that it was meant for her.

"I knew that there would be a point in my life, no matter what, that I would connect both my personal love and professional love and work in sport."

During her corporate placement in the program, Oldfield was working for the Canadian Olympic Foundation.

She had a lot of responsibility as an intern on her team. She worked passionately to plan and execute the Flag Bearers Initiative campaign, an alumni giving campaign, as well as "A Conversation with..." webinar series, which included conversations with athletes on Team Canada. She credits her mentors, Jillian Philipp and Cindy Yelle at the foundation for giving her the skills and the encouragement to make her a future co-ordinator. Her mentors have shed light on the fact that women in sports and women in business can succeed, and to this day she appreciates them deeply. Jillian Philipp expressed her experience managing Oldfield.

"On numerous occasions, Olivia was the first to raise her hand to take on a new or challenging task...Olivia consistently demonstrates a 'will to win' attitude in everything that she does," Philipp said.

During Oldfield's placement in 2020, COVID-19 placed her schooling and workplace on break. No one knew the



Photo credit Alexandra Miller-Gerrard

Olivia Oldfield never fails to smile while thinking of her motivation for her career in sport.

outcome that would result, but the support system of DCPR helped her through the transition from post-secondary to the workforce.

Oldfield has found much success within only two years post-grad. She was



Photo credit Unknown

Olivia Oldfield expresses her excitement as she got to work at the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games.

promoted to philanthropic and Communications Co-ordinator in the Canadian Olympic Foundation following her Durham College convocation in 2020.

With her philanthropic experience at the Canadian Olympic Foundation, Oldfield became a Senior Marketing Co-ordinator in 2022 for community and events at a

worldwide-known professional sports association this year. Her role now has a focus on making an impact and bringing sports into undeserved communities around the country in a constantly growing fan base.

Her new role targets Oldfield's main goal in life, which is to make an impact wherever she goes. No matter the effort, her focus is to be able to make a difference in at least one person's life.

"If I can change one life for the better, that is the most important thing for me," she said.


"I learned more in that six months than I could have probably learned in six years. I learned a lot about myself as a person...and to give that back [to the winners] it's a moment I'd never forget."

Oldfield advocates that being a young woman in sports comes with obstacles that she faces daily. She works hard to have the corporate world understand people like her

more: people who care about change have different ways of accomplishing it.

Accomplishments in careers should be something everyone is aware of within themselves, and Oldfield humbly accounts her impact during her career so far. Working on the Team Canada 50/50, a charitable gaming initiative— the first of its kind in Canada— running in almost every province and territory, the team was able to raise approximately \$3 million and give half back to our communities. She recounts this as a challenging and taxing experience, which helped her to discover more about herself.

"I learned more in that six months than I could have probably learned in six years. I learned a lot about myself as a person...and to give that money back [to the winners]... it's a moment I'd never forget," Oldfield said.

Oldfield's story shows that passion and dedication to something you love can take you where you belong in the world. She was a girl who loved watching the Olympics and grew up to then work for the Olympics. For the love of anything, and for the love of sport. 

Paddle against the current

By Tyler Jones

In today's social climate, we've seen a shift in people being comfortable enough to be open about their struggles with mental health. What once was perhaps seen as a weakness or oversharing, is now regarded as empowering and relatable.

Since it will be World Mental Health Day in the coming weeks, it's a good time to profile a wonderfully unique local clothing business.

“She paddled her own canoe and lived happily ever after. The end.”

Lauren Bull is the owner of Canoe & Lake, a clothing brand designed to inspire people to paddle their own canoe. This is a sentiment that empowered Bull to admit herself to an inpatient anorexia recovery program at Toronto General Hospital.

The year she spent in the hospital taught her more about herself than she ever could have hoped for.

“I was honestly lucky to have been kept in there for a year,” says Bull. “I was totally lost.”

Having leaned specifically on her grandmother to stay strong, Bull exited the hospital with a new view of herself; she had realized she was a fighter. It was from there she began to establish herself within a marketing and advertising career in the corporate world, and simultaneously became a mother.

Bull had built herself all the way back up from rock bottom, to then find herself as a single mother, paddling her own canoe once again.

However, it may have been the best thing for her. After having discovered what a resilient person she is, she used this as a motivator in beginning the next chapter of her life.

This woman has been through a lot at a young age, so in spite of these challenging life experiences, what does it all add up to? A clothing business.



Photo Credit: Lauren Bull
Lauren Bull, a DC alumni, poses around while visiting various Ontario Airbnbs, with her clothing brand on.

Canoe & Lake is a clothing business that acknowledges our struggles as moments in time that help us grow and become more self aware. "I've always loved fashion and standing out." says Bull.

Her original designs were not only inspired by her dear grandmother's vast collection of paintings, but the influence she had on her life.

"I'm so lucky to have grown up around such a strong woman," says Bull. "She was fiercely independent." What makes Bull's business so special, is her willingness to be as open as possible about her story, even as the face of her brand.

"I've always struggled with finding my purpose," she says. "Now that I'm a mom I want to instil in my kids that they can follow their dreams."

Another special aspect of Canoe & Lake is Bull's dedication to spreading awareness about what she believes is an underrepresented strand of mental illness - eating disorders. "Our country simply doesn't have enough resources for people with eating disorders," says Bull.



Photo Credit: Lauren Bull

The quote that Lauren Bull continuously told herself ended up being her first trademark, and one of her best-selling designs.

Bull's desire to uplift and inspire other struggling women is so readily apparent, as the

core messages derived from her life are found in almost all aspects of Canoe and Lake's

releases. The very name of the company is inspired by the idea that as we paddle against the current, we will grow and learn things about our inner strength that we never thought possible.

Like her most famous quote says, "She paddled her own canoe and lived happily ever after. The end."

Through both of her jobs as a mother and a business owner, that is exactly what Lauren Bull is doing. 🌱

For resources
about eating
disorders
please visit
nedic.ca

~

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Educating Durham's community of tomorrow

Story and photos by Kaleigh Duff

Kaitlyn Souch is educating the future of the community, and that is one of the greatest honours of all. For Souch, returning to her alma mater to pass on her experience to students has generated the kind of pride that all DC alumni should feel within their community. With years of experience, and a desire to better her community, Souch has crafted a rewarding career with many more years of greatness and education to come.

Born and raised in the Durham region, Souch began her professional education fresh out of high school in 2006 by joining the Graphic Design program at Durham College. After working in design and branding for several years, Souch discovered that her chosen area of expertise was not as fulfilling as she had expected. Upon the decision to return to school, Souch tried a few different pathways, but ended up

landing back at DC due to her great experiences. After returning, Souch found herself in the marketing program. "I came back to DC to pursue marketing... and the rest is history." In Souch's words, after discovering her niche at Durham College, the rest is history! For Souch, deciding what to do for the rest of her life was challenging, but now with years of experience she helps students in the same position learn about their likes and dislikes. "It's hard to figure out what you want to do when you're that young, and for me personally, I always knew I wanted to do something creative and in the tech space. [...] I always liked drawing and doing web designs and that," she said.

At this point, Souch is a social media strategist and educator by day, and a blogger by night. Beginning her career during the time of social media's groundbreaking development drew Souch



Kaitlyn Souch is a Durham College trailblazer, helping Durham's community grow each and everyday.

to her niche, which involves strategic work with social media. Souch has won around 20 awards for her work in various positions she has held within her career. Most recently, she was awarded for COVID Crisis Communications over the course of the pandemic by Durham College. Souch has worked in a multitude of different environments. Within the design and branding world, as a freelancer, and

for organizations like Etsy, the Government of Canada, Brock University, Procter and Gamble, various start-up companies and, eventually, Durham College.

In 2015, Souch returned to her alma mater as part of her career path. "It kind of goes back to why I chose DC as a student. I felt really supported at the college, and I just kind of wanted to be a part of that and give back to the rest of the campus community through



Kaitlyn Souch currently works for Durham College as a social media strategist.

my work. Which is how I ended up at DC eventually, by signing various contracts until my current role.” said Souch.

Today, Souch works at Durham College as a social media strategist, and a course instructor for Social Media and Web Principles. Not only does Souch educate students, but she is also responsible for the delivery of a workshop aimed to educate and train Durham College staff on social media. She enjoys helping others advance their careers and develop their skills, hence why

she is such a well-respected and necessary member of the Durham College faculty. Souch’s most rewarding point in her career relates to her contributions to Durham College’s student body.

“It’s really rewarding to watch students go through their journey and to help them in any way that you can when they have questions or concerns.”

The ability to aid students in the most important self-development phase of their lives, satisfies a notion of everlasting learning, and community responsibility for Souch. “You see someone who is posting that they’ve applied to Durham College. Then you recognize the name again when they’re posting that they accepted. Then you see them throughout their entire college career sharing their life as a student, and then you end up seeing them at convocation when you’re working at convocation. It’s really rewarding to watch students go through their journey and to help them in any way that you can when they have questions or concerns,” Souch said.

Souch’s career at Durham College is just one of hundreds of amazing employee origin stories. For the college, investment in alumni affairs has proven to be the greatest move yet, as almost every staff member is alumni, or has connections to the institution in one way or another. “Every single employee at the college is making a difference in student lives and helping them in their journey,” said Souch about alumni affairs and

college employees. By seeking education within a community, the same goodness can be returned by applying experience and wisdom back into the same environment that fostered your learning. Durham College arguably continues to provide the best educational environment in the region; and by supporting students, staff, and alumni just like Souch herself, DC continues to lead the way for decades to come. 🍀

Interested in joining the Durham College Community?

Amongst nine academic faculties, there are countless programs to choose from.

Join the Durham College community today! Learn more about what’s offered at www.durhamcollege.ca

What's scary to some, inspires hope in others.

By Guede Djimi

Photo Credit Danielle Harder

Each and every one of us has a story to tell. What separates us from one another is our journey. Vocalizing our unique journey inspires hope in others to evolve in life.

In August 2022, Andrew Neary, a first-year Journalism – Mass Media student, approached Danielle Harder, Journalism - Mass Media program co-ordinator, with an idea to provide an outlet and safe space for aspiring entrepreneurs to speak about their journey.

Harder thought it was brilliant and decided to reach out to the Office of Research Services, Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ORSIE), in hopes of integrating it into their innovative FastStart DC and Enactus programs. A month later, with support from ORSIE, Harder and Neary built up the concept gradually by putting together a team of professors and students from various programs within the Faculty of Media, Art and Design to create the

entrepreneurial podcast known today as Founders Drive.

The programs that joined this project are the following: Journalism – Mass Media, Photography, Advertising and Promotion, PR and Strategic Communications, Interactive Media Design, and Graphic Design.

“This student-produced platform is looking to inspire young minds to consider entrepreneurship as a career path.”

“The reason why we decided to do it as an Enactus project is to show that the students involved can also be inspired and hone tangible skills to enter the entrepreneurship world one day,” says Danielle Harder.

Harder further expanded the project by connecting with two major partners: Cooperative Education and Work-Integrated Learning (CEWIL) and the Venture Development Institute.

CEWIL provided nearly



The Founders Drive strives to inspire entrepreneurs to embrace their journey.

\$15,000 in funding, which allowed the team to hire 18 students from six programs, while Venture Development Institute provided mentorship and \$3,000 of in-kind donation.

“This student-produced platform is looking to inspire young minds to consider entrepreneurship as a career path,” says Neary. “I think through storytelling, critical reflection and discussions

about sensitive, challenging and insightful topics related to issues facing entrepreneurs today, we’re building a safe space to ask questions today, to help them thrive tomorrow.”

The team of students working on Founders Drive recently completed the interviews for their first season, going above and beyond to locate aspiring entrepreneurs from all over the world.



A round table discussion about entrepreneurship during a studio session of the Founders Drive.

Season 1 covers impactful topics, such as what is an entrepreneur; how can I be one; getting past 'no'; and how to measure your success as an entrepreneur. All of the episode topics are explored by the business owners invited on the show to speak about their

journey as entrepreneurs.

Additionally, the Founders Drive's team curated a safe space by offering a collaborative storytelling approach where their guests can feel comfortable and use their voices to inspire others.

"One thing that we try

to stay away from is to be considered as extractive storytellers," Harder says. "We don't want to just take their stories for our own benefit but rather provide resources to help them succeed as well."

Founders Drive officially launched to the public on

World Entrepreneurship Day on Aug. 21, 2023.

For Neary, he hopes Founders Drive will have an impact on potential and new entrepreneurs.

"We hope to inspire people to consider the idea of entrepreneurship for themselves," says Neary, "and motivate them to overcome barriers to self-determination."



FOUNDERS DRIVE
LISTEN. INSPIRE. IGNITE.



Patching equality

By: Alex Nelson

Photos by Tianna McFarlane

Durham College (DC) alumnae Tianna McFarlane graduated from the Business Operations Management program in 2012. The program taught her a variety of skills, including accounting, inventory, purchasing, marketing, logistics, and business math. Before her vacation in 2019, McFarlane cut her leg. She went into stores in search of a bandage that matched her skin tone. Having no success, she chose a bandage that she felt stuck out like a sore thumb.

This moment sparked her inspiration and lit a fire for McFarlane.

In 2021, she launched her brand Heal In Colour using the skills and knowledge she gained from her program. Heal In Colour aims to revolutionize how you shop for bandages. The company's mission is to make black and brown bandages the norm.

"I went to various stores, including Walmart, Sobeys, and Shoppers Drug Mart,



Heal in Colour sample product of assorted box.

but I couldn't find any black or brown bandages," says McFarlane. "I found that shocking at this point. So, I thought, maybe this is an opportunity to start my own line of bandages for people of diverse skin tones."

Heal In Colour bandages are available in three different colours: honey, almond, and chestnut, and two sizes: 56 x 19 mm and 76 x 25 mm. McFarlane is also the first Canadian brand to develop

this product. The product has sold more than 5,000 boxes in less than a year since its launch. Despite the invention of bandages in 1920, we are only now getting diverse skin colour bandages, thanks to McFarlane and her desire to use her diploma for something meaningful.

"It made me sad in the beginning," said McFarlane. "I couldn't believe that we are in 2021 and I'm the first to create this product. But

on the other hand, I felt good because I was able to create this product for individuals like myself who are looking for this kind of product. The ability to have bandages that match all students' skin tones is something I did not have growing up. I see how much the world is moving forward and how things are changing."

"It made me sad in the beginning."

Presently, McFarlane's product is available at the Toronto District School Board, the Durham District School Board, and both the York University and DC bookstores. McFarlane is in the process of bringing her product to Sobeys as part of an expansion of her brand. In 2022, McFarlane is set to release four new boxes, which will include three individual colour boxes and an assorted box with circle, butterfly, and square bandages. While big companies continue to operate in a static state, McFarlane breaks the mold. 🌱

Durham College's Behind The Scenes MAD IT Services

By Adam Ramadhar

IT specialist Conner Pulis entered Durham College in 2011 to study game development and graduated in 2014. After graduating, he started working for smaller tech companies doing small repairs and IT work. He also worked on Apple products for three years and is now back to Durham College as an alumni working as an IT specialist in the Faculty of Media, Art & Design. The things he does are take care of the software and hardware for the Media, Art and Design students that have IT issues.

One of the few tech companies that Conner worked for is Alary Technologies, they are a certified Apple repair centre which is located in Downtown Oshawa. They mainly do walk-in repairs and have an IT side where they help smaller compaines that use Apple products. "They usually do anything from dentists to



Conner Pulis at his desk working as MAD's IT specialist

“Keeping them on there I don’t have to do much but it’s more trouble shooting, I find after the first couple weeks most students come in with errors in their software and I helped solve those.”

lawyers to graphic designers, they manage the IT side of things,” said Pulis. Now at Durham College He takes care of the software along with other jobs that also go with taking care of the servers and software. He’s given a list of students that have applied for Media, Art, & Design

programs, and puts their names on a list along with the users that need Adobe for their program on their admin panel, so on the first day they may be able to access it. Pulis says, “Keeping them on there I don’t have to do much but it’s more troubleshooting, I find after the first couple weeks

most students come in with errors in their software and I help solve those (errors).” states Pulis. When it comes to using Adobe applications some are easy to use and some are more difficult to use. “Its always good to keep your software (up-to-date), but don’t update your operating system right away if you have Mac, because Apple likes to produce a new operating system and it usually comes out super buggy and has a lot problems and it leads to a lot of people being frustrated especially since they can’t roll back right away,” says Pulis.

Conner being an IT specialist provides help and assistant to the Faculty of Media, Art and Design. Whenever there is an issue with any hardware or software, he’s always there and able to get the job done as quickly as possible. Conner loves what he does and is glad to be part of the Durham College community. 🍀

Just getting started

By Afrika Nieves-Bentley

Photos by Afrika Nieves-Bentley

Cassie-Jean Dillon says that her grandson is going to be the prime minister of Canada. If he does, he could be the country's first Indigenous head of government. That would be quite the achievement, but in the meantime, Dillon is the one blazing trails and smashing glass ceilings. She has faced racism and sexism her whole life, but she doesn't let anything or anybody stop her. She's on a mission to improve the lives of racialized people. What will she do to achieve her goals?

"Whatever it takes."

Dillon graduated from Durham College's Fitness and Health Promotion program in 2018. The program gave her valuable skills that translate to the workplace while also helping her achieve her main goal in life, empowering Indigenous women and children. She is already a role model for Indigenous students at DC. Not only is she a successful graduate, but



Cassie-Jean Dillon will do whatever it takes to achieve her goals and she'll do it with a smile.

she sits on the DC Alumni Association Board of Directors! Her presence on the Board is a powerful symbol of Indigenous visibility and through it, she helps future graduates reach their potential.

She jokes about the racist encounters she has suffered through, but there is pain behind the smile. Without

prompting, she talks about the children who died at residential schools. They didn't get to grow up and follow their dreams like she has, but she won't forget about them.

"Their souls were screaming for justice," she says. "Their bodies needed to be found for their souls to get that justice."

Education is another

element of that justice. After completing college, she enrolled at Trent University in the Sociology and Indigenous Studies honours program, from which she will graduate this April.

"The micro affects the macro," she explains. "Every individual who stands up for justice changes the world with their example."

Recently, a man stuck his middle finger out at her in public and referred to Indigenous people as, "you people." She explained to him how hurtful his actions were. She's very proud of herself, her culture and her lost language.

Because of residential schools and other systemic racism, her very nation lost its name. It is known as the Mohawk Nation, but that is technically incorrect, because it is a name given to those people by colonizers. Dillon says in time people will be ready to learn the real name, the Kanien'kehá, but for now, it's more important they learn that Indigenous groups are not a monolith. She reminds

“Every individual who stands up for justice changes the world with their example.”

people that they can tell the difference between Germany, Italy and Switzerland, so they can understand that Indigenous nations are distinct.

In her nation, there is a tradition wherein an Elder gives a younger person their name. Legally, her name is Dillon, but culturally, it is Teknihatut. She didn't get a name from a community Elder until after her father passed away. Now that she has this name, his spirit will be able to find her. In a way, her father is helping her empower herself and her people even though he is no longer with us.

The most important people to her in this world are her daughter and her grandchildren: Memphis, ten and Ella, eight. Memphis is the one with ambitions to be the prime minister. No matter what he or his sister grow up to do, Dillon is extremely proud of them.

Dillon isn't discouraged by all the work that must be done. She is optimistic that settler society and Indigenous peoples can achieve the goal



Dillon is breaking down barriers.

of reconciliation. Every time someone listens to another person's story, the goal gets

easier to achieve. When she was a student at DC, Dillon would sometimes give fellow

students a ride to campus even if she didn't know them. She just knew that they shared common struggles, regardless of ethnicity. Some of her classmates were away from home for the first time and were grateful that someone was looking out for them.

When she was their age, she was living at a campus, but not as a student. In the early '80s, Dillon lived in a ravine near the University of Toronto campus in Scarborough, Ont. She was on a mission to reject materialistic society. She says it would be too dangerous to do nowadays, but back then it was a great adventure. When she became a mother, she left her campus-crashing days behind her.

Now she's a mother, a grandmother, a community activist and a soon-to-be university graduate. She has lived such a full life, yet in so many ways, she's just getting started. 🍀

Hold your tongu... no, eat your tongue!

By Gaia Ninzatti

On Nov. 7, 2022, Durham College second-year Culinary Management students Sahil Ahuja and Adreanna Russell won the title of Canada's Best New Student Chefs at the 2022 edition of *Cooks the Books*. *Cooks the Books* is a competition hosted by Taste Canada and sponsored by Canadian Beef. *Cooks the Books* is a competition that invites culinary students from all the province, in 2022, 8 colleges competed against each other for the title of Canada's Best New Student Chefs. Every year the sponsor differs. This year it was the turn of Canadian Beef, therefore, the students were required to create a dish selecting a cut of beef of their choice.

And here is where Ahuja and Russell played their trump card by selecting beef tongue as their main protein for their dish. "We knew we didn't want to use a traditional cut of beef," said Russell. "We wanted to stand out." And they sure

did. Their winning dish made of corned beef tongue with mustard jus, pickled cabbage and glazed carrots, made the students go back home with a combined cash prize of \$3,000 and kitchen tools and supplies for a total worth of \$15,000.

“Both of these students have a similar work ethic, showing up early, helping others when they can, meeting or exceeding the expectation of the classes in product quality, time management and execution.”

"I've had the pleasure of having Adreanna and Sahil in my lab and lecture classes in the fall and winter semesters of the their final year of culinary management at DC," said David Hawey, professor and



Photo credit: Chef Peter Lee

Chef Peter Lee was the mentor of Sahil Ahuja and Adreanna Russell at the *Cooks the Books* competition that was held on Nov. 7, 2022. The winners were announced the following night at a gala evening, where the successful trio made us all DC Proud.

program coordinator. "Both of these students have a similar work ethic, showing up early, helping others when they can, meeting or exceeding

the expectation of the classes in product quality, time management and execution of required skills. One of their greatest traits is that they are

willing to provide encouragement and hints to their classmates to add to their learning experience.” Future holds great things in sight for Russell and Ahuja.

“ One of their greatest traits is that they are helpful to others in their class, willing to provide encouragement and hints to their classmates to add to their learning experience. ”

Russell is due to test her capable skills in an upcoming international BBQ competition, while Ahuja is due to represent Durham College along other two classmates at the 2023 Skills Ontario competition in May.

All these incredible opportunities will bring these two skilled chefs very far, hopefully to reach their ultimate dreams, which for Ahuja is to own his own restaurant, while for Russell is to become a personal chef with focus on nutrition.

Let's take a step back and



Photo credit: Stephen Chu

The winning dish presented at the Cooks the Books competition by Sahil Ahuja and Adreanna Russell, corned beef tongue with mustard jus, pickled cabbage and glazed carrots. The unique cut chosen for their dish was key to Ahuja and Russell's success.

understand where their love for food and cuisine began; Russell's love for food began at a young age in her mother's kitchen, only a few miles away from Durham College, for her cooking is a way of sharing love.

At the same time, Ahuja's love for cooking started thousands of miles away not only from Durham College, but from Canada too, in India. Both of his parents are employed in hospitality, and while testing

all the amazing facets that hospitality offers, Ahuja's preference settled in the kitchen.

2022 has been a great year for Durham College, with multiple students and alumni winning important competitions and awards, including another student from the Culinary and Management program Tre Sanderson who has won the last edition of Top Chef Canada. Durham College is truly "leading the way".

To find out more about the Culinary Management program scan the QR code



Leading the way, one innovation at a time

By Sameeksha

In 2022, Durham College (DC) was named one of the Top 50 research colleges in Canada, an honour that has been consistent for nine years now. The college has become a leader in applied research and entrepreneurship support, thanks in part to the work of Debbie McKee Demczyk, the Dean of Research Services. With over a decade of experience at the college, McKee Demczyk has played a significant role in developing the Office of Research Services Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ORSIE), which provides support to students and local organizations.

“ORSIE is here to provide experiential learning opportunities to students and to provide problem-solving as well as talent to organizations working in the community and beyond,” says McKee Demczyk.

The journey to ORSIE’s current state began back in 2009 when DC became part of the Colleges Ontario Network for Industry Innovation (CONII), a program aimed at connecting colleges with local businesses to help them grow and innovate.

“ORSIE provides experiential learning opportunities to students and problem-solving to organizations. ”

McKee Demczyk has a strong connection to the Durham community, having lived and worked in the area for most of her life. This close relationship with the community has allowed her to understand its needs and provide relevant support through ORSIE. However, her association with the college started as a



Photo by Sameeksha

Debbie McKee Demczyk has been a part of Durham College’s research wing for over a decade. In her time as the dean of Office of Research Services, Innovation and Entrepreneurship she spearheaded the formation of five centres.

strategic planner.

“I came to Durham College on what I thought was going to be a short-term secondment when the college was going through a strategic planning

process,” she says. “It was identified that the college needed an institutional research team. So once the strategic plan was approved and I was about to finish up my

term, the Board of Governors approved an institutional research and government relations department, and I was asked to stay on.”

For McKee Demczyk and the college, it has been a fantastic ride ever since as the institution has continued to grow, working with students and the community. With her team now, McKee Demczyk heads five applied research centres, the Artificial Intelligence Hub (AI Hub), the Centre for Craft Brewing Innovation, the MRC studio, the Centre for Cybersecurity and the Social Impact Hub. All these centres provide experiential learning to DC students, giving them the opportunity to use their skills in solving real-world, community and technical problems.

In 2019, the AI Hub worked with Precise ParkLink, a parking management service provider and one of ORSIE’s industry partner, to develop an AI-powered virtual parking assistant kiosk capable of answering questions related to parking regulations. This is one of the leading edge innovations developed by ORSIE.

“No matter what you learn



Photo by Denice Quimbo

With a new space of their own on-campus, the five research centres aim to collaborate often to provide a learning experiential platform to Durham College students.

“ORSIE is a cutting edge service for Durham College leading the way in building a strong community.”

in the classroom, till the time you are not implementing it to solve actual problems the education is incomplete,” says Pooja Hegde, student enrolled in Artificial Intelligence Analysis program at Durham College. “The AI Hub works on

multiple live projects and help the students involved to gain industry knowledge and make valuable connections before they even graduate,”

She is one of the many students working as a research assistant with ORSIE who is

helping to meet real-world challenges and innovations.

Not only does she can apply her knowledge, but she also gets to learn from and interact with other research assistants working on diverse projects.

“The work integrated learning experience at ORSIE is providing me with a sense of accomplishing something real,” says Hegde. “The feeling of seeing your work make a difference is unmatched.”

McKee Demczyk and the team at ORSIE have made a significant impact at Durham College. With a strong focus on meeting the needs of the community and providing opportunities for students, ORSIE is a prime example of how colleges can play a vital role in community’s economic development by recruiting the help of students and problem-solvers alike.

“Our institution is well positioned to contribute to the Durham community around changing technologies and innovation,” says McKee Demczyk. “ORSIE is a cutting edge service for Durham College leading the way in building a strong and empowered community.”

The solo show

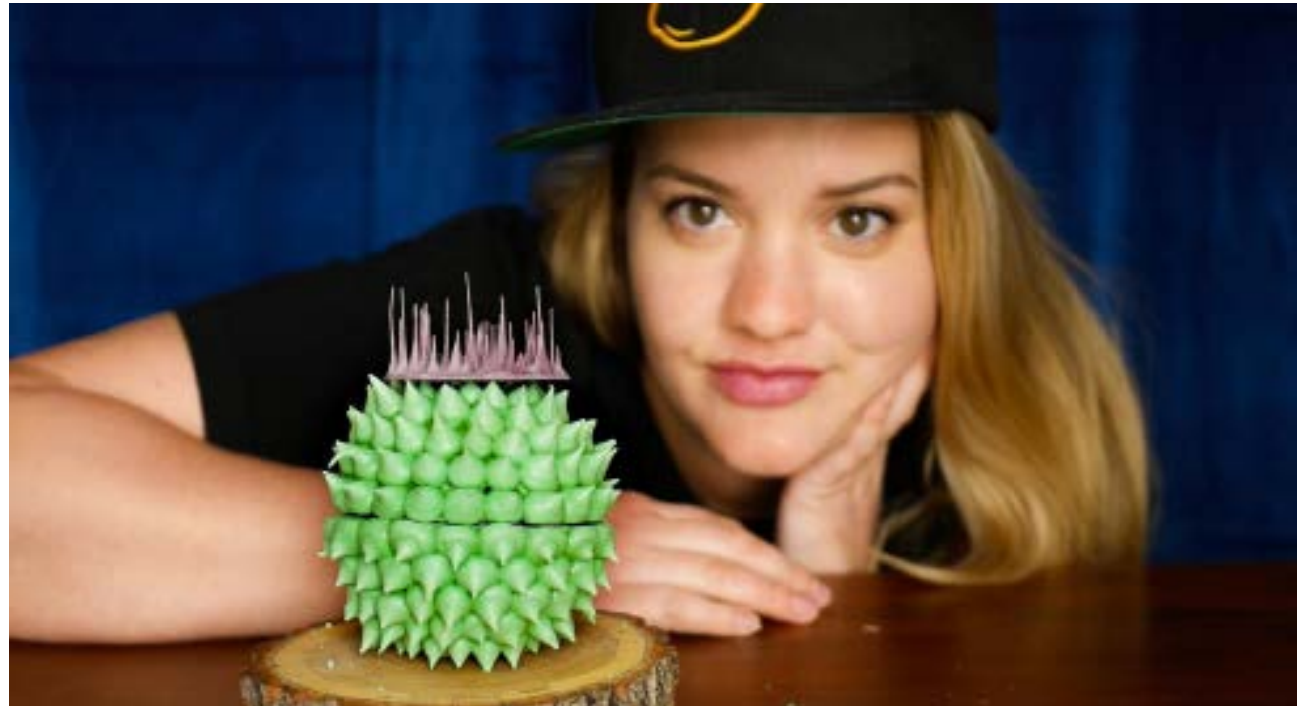
By Thamini Subakaran

Photos by Kristin Atwood

Imagine creating your own potion, experimenting with food, and creating authentic films all at the same time. This isn't a far stretch for the talented Kristin Atwood, who is a solo performer - she's a producer, director, cinematographer, and a gourmet chef.

“I just cried, didn't bother checking, and then I got an email, which said congratulations on your Emmy nomination. And I was like, what? So, I scrolled through and then I just cried, and I had to finish the painting I was working on.”

Durham College (DC) alumna, Kristin Atwood, enrolled in the advanced



The Emmy nominee Kristin Atwood showcasing her master creation “The Thistle”

baking and pastry arts certificate program. She is passionate about food and hopes to one day work in the food media or videography industry. She was a traveller before enrolling in the program, where she visited places like Scotland and Paris and was inspired by discovering new cultures and foods. As a kid, she enjoyed

reading the Harry Potter series and was fascinated by the idea of potions homework. She enjoyed the idea of being able to experiment and play around with her ideas. The program at DC helped her gain hands-on experience while utilizing her skills and enhancing her knowledge in culinary. Now it's her turn, to start her potion homework in the program.

“As a Durham resident and student, it was nice to be part of a smaller class size where I was heard,” she says. “I could stay in touch with my professors until today and have great career opportunities.”

Upon graduating from her program, Atwood created a YouTube channel called *Chef Studio*. Her unique approach blends her food

channel with filmmaking to create a masterpiece that has now become an established channel and a growing content creator. In addition to cooking, Atwood has a passion for the entertainment industry. Knowing that there weren't many opportunities for female film directors, she took the step to become one of many leading female directors in her generation by solo directing and producing her content and pursued her journey. Her YouTube channel went from a few hundred views to over six million, as recent DC graduate she is now a full-time successful content creator.

“As a Durham resident and student, it was nice to be part of a smaller class size where I was heard and stay in touch with my professors until today and have great career opportunities.”

One of Atwood's most life-changing moments may have occurred in March of 2020. The YouTube series *At Home Pasta Series* was nominated

for an Emmy award and was recognized for its excellence. As the pandemic struck and left us to quarantine at home, Atwood wanted to use her time wisely. With the help of her channel and her culinary skills, this series was to help those utilize the staples they have at home from scratch. She created short videos that

describe how viewers could easily replicate unique recipes like cheese and ricotta ravioli. In addition to her Emmy nomination, Atwood has been recognized with two Webby Awards for her work on Food & Drink and How-To, Explainer, and DIY shows.

Along with the most prestigious James Beard Award

for her creativity. When asked how she felt the moment she found out she was nominated for an Emmy award, Atwood was in utter disbelief and joy.

“I just cried, didn't bother checking,” she says. “And then I got an email, which said congratulations on your Emmy nomination. And I was like, what? So, I scrolled through and then I just cried, and I had to finish the painting I was working on.”

Atwood is currently cooking up a bunch of new projects with a company called Cinetopia, expanding her channel with a film-making company based in Scotland for Chef Studio and as well as collaborating with other producers in creating the *Secret Book*. As an inspiring DC alumna continues to expand and follow new endeavors. We hope her inspiring story will open up opportunities for students in the future. 🍴



A proud smile characterizes Kristin Atwood, who is ready to expand her channel internationally.

A star is born in the trades

By Amanda Walmsley

Photos by Brandon Bird

We are constantly told that what life has in store for us will come true in one way or another. While some individuals don't believe this, Durham College (DC) alumnus Brandon Bird has experienced it first-hand.

Bird was always under the impression he was going to have a career in the film industry, even with his family founding a very successful mechanical, general and design contracting business, Bird Mechanical Ltd., in 1971. Growing up, he spent his summers and holidays working alongside his father while learning the ropes of how the business was run, yet there was always a voice inside of him saying he should give the film industry a chance. With that persistent thought in mind, he enrolled in the Toronto Film School, graduated in 2008 and had a small stint working in the industry. However, when the family business needed some help, Bird came to assist with no questions asked. After

working alongside his father as an adult, he finally realized that this was the career that he was meant for and promptly changed career paths, leaving the film industry behind.

"I'll never forget the look on my father's face when I went to him and said 'OK, I'll do this,'" says Bird. "He looked at me wondering if it was a joke and a camera was going to pop out somewhere."

“I'll never forget the look on my father's face when I went to him and said 'OK, I'll do this'.”

After his realization, Bird came to DC for a Plumbing Apprenticeship so that he could be completely knowledgeable in the field that he was going to be working in for the rest of his life. Between the years of 2009-2012, Bird completed his basic, intermediate and advanced plumbing courses for his apprenticeship at the DC Whitby, Ont. campus and credits a lot of his success to



DC alumnus Brandon Bird representing Bird Mechanical Ltd. in his office after being named the youngest CEO in the family business's history.



Bird putting his DC education and family knowledge to the test while working on an electrical machine at Bird Mechanical Ltd.

his time at DC.

"My time there was awesome," says Bird. "A lot of people don't look forward to going to trade school because of the schooling portion. Everyone just wants to be in the field so they can be working, but I found it was full of a lot of good times and good people. I learned a lot because you get to see all the different skill sets that people have from their work environments."

"I learned a lot because you get to see all the different skill sets that people have from their work environments."

Bird is now the chair on the DC program advisory committee for the plumbing side of the Mechanical Techniques program, along with being a member on the Durham College Foundation Board of Directors. Due to him caring so deeply about DC, in 2021 Bird Mechanical Ltd. donated \$150,000 to the Whitby campus' skilled trades expansion so that there can

continue to be exceptionally knowledgeable individuals entering the field with their DC education behind them.

"I found it was a lot of good times and good people."

As someone who was adamant about breaking the tradition of entering the family business, Bird has become a very successful man in both his personal and work life because of it. Today, he is now the youngest Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in the company's history and is constantly looking for more ways to take the company to the highest level that it can go.

Eager to see where life takes him, Bird is more excited than ever to put his energy into taking Bird Mechanical Ltd. to new lengths, while also continuing to grow his relationship with DC. 🏠

Bridging the gap between client and student

By Jalen Gause-Magloire

Photo Credit: Dawn Salter

What happens when Durham College Media, Art and Design students work together with local businesses? Results. Creative opportunities are made possible through the *Collaboragency*. *Collaboragency* is an innovative full-service agency hub where students and businesses from diverse backgrounds partner together to deliver impactful communication.

The members of *Collaboragency* are part of a skilled and disciplined team of students from programs such as: advertising, public relations, graphic design, interactive media, journalism, photography and more. Small foundations, businesses and groups look to grow and further their brand through strategic planning techniques, including the usage of web tools, social media and marketing content creation.

Ontario is home to several business initiatives created with the goal of improving their immediate communities and environments. Whether it be a

new agency or an established corporation, it is essential to stay current on ever-involving trends and innovations, which has proven to be a challenge that some small businesses face to successfully thrive or exist within today's marketplace. This is where *Collaboragency* offers clients a unique "synergistic" approach to business solutions.

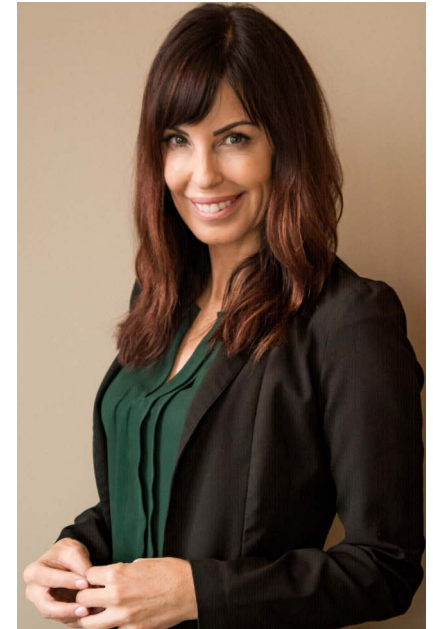
“It’s extremely fundamental in helping me see my areas of strength in advertising. *Collaboragency* operates similarly to your typical advertising agency, so we get an immersive practical experience, which is very valuable.”

The process of experiential learning involves ‘physically’ learning through experience. It is a newer and proven tool in the “learning-to-working”

transition of most post-secondary students. The concept allows students to apply their knowledge and skills in real life situations rather than simulation. When asked about their experience with *Collaboragency*, advertising student Faith-Liana Laylor describes the experience.

“It’s extremely fundamental in helping me see my areas of strength in advertising. *Collaboragency* operates similarly to your typical advertising agency, so we get an immersive practical experience, which is very valuable.”

The agency was founded by Dawn Salter, a Durham College alumna. She is a professor and the program co-ordinator for both the Advertising and Marketing Communications program, as well as Digital Media Management programs. Her educational background and experience spans over 28 years. She created *Collaboragency* so students could experience the rigors of the workplace first-hand while



Dawn Salter is the founder of *Collaboragency*.

applying their knowledge and skills to develop and implement real solutions for real clients. The experience helps in finding career placement opportunities and provides a great head start.

With the importance that social media plays in today's marketplace, some organizations subscribe to professional resources for fees up to ten thousand dollars per month. With

Collaboragency, organizations have the opportunity to utilize social media information from students. A typical *Collaboragency* team will develop high-level social media strategic plans and conduct a social media audit for their client.

“While local businesses continue to open and operate, I see *Collaboragency* being not only beneficial to Durham College advertising students, but as well to businesses within the Durham region that benefit from a collaboration of this kind.”

A key planning step for students is group discussion, to determine the type of brand a company portrays and how best to position themselves for success in their business.

“The work these students do for their internships is for real clients,” says Salter “allowing them to obtain junior roles for real-life positions.” Students who take advantage of the opportunities provided by *Collaboragency* build long-lasting connections and relationships with their clients,



Part of Dawn's job is guiding students to help them reach their fullest potential

as well as the gift of developing the tools and experience necessary to transition to the working world after graduation.

“Some of the requests from the clients are sometimes outside the abilities of the advertising students, like those in the journalism, graphic design, and multimedia programs,” said Salter.

Students are expected to set realistic and achievable goals with clients, to be developed and implemented throughout the semester. Jamie Pye explained some challenges of the *Collaboragency* process saying, “Sometimes clients have a different vision than you do. One of the biggest challenges is learning how to have open and honest

communication so that you can do what is best for your client without coming off as too headstrong.” says Pye “One of the biggest challenges, creative-wise was trying to help a brand find their theme and branding.” She further elaborated that one way to overcome these challenges is using the brainpower of all students to work together. Challenges do arise with students while working, advertising student Mayank Sethi describes. “My biggest challenge was trying to find a way around my nervousness,” she says, “being an international student and attending in-person classes with students of varying backgrounds and levels of

learning I was intimidated at first. I overcame this challenge by initiating conversations with my peers with an open mind and realized we had a similar mindset regarding our academic and career goals.”

With the success that *Collaboragency* has already seen in its early years, it is clear that everyone involved has benefited from the work and will vouch that it is a successful agency. With time, the agency will continue to grow and benefit those that are willing to try something new. When asked where they can see *Collaboragency* in five years, Pye envisioned it. “While local businesses continue to open and operate, I see *Collaboragency* being not only beneficial to Durham College advertising students, but as well to businesses within the Durham region that benefit from a collaboration of this kind.” she says.

For those interested in attending or want more information about Durham College, the faculty of Media, Art, and Design and or *Collaboragency* please visit durhamcollege.ca for contact information. 📍

Be your own boss

By Morgan Mitchell

Photo Credit: Liz Beddall

While working for someone else is a terrific way to start a career in business, not everyone will be a good fit for that lifestyle. Anyone stuck in a job they detest would consider quitting to be their own boss, set their own hours, and make their own decisions. That's exactly what Durham College

“I started my business in 2020, it actually felt like this was my passion, it all just came to me so naturally.”

(DC) alumna Ana Pautassi did.

Pautassi graduated with an advanced diploma in Journalism - Print and Broadcast from Durham College and a bachelor of arts in communications from Ontario Tech University. She soon began working various nine-to-five marketing and writing jobs in the corporate world, but after a few years, she began to feel disconnected, almost as if

something was missing. She enjoyed it, but that sense of missing something took its toll on her, and she began to experience burnout.

She felt overwhelmed and found herself glued to her work computer 24/7. She would go on holidays and return to over 200 emails on her work computer. It became overwhelming, and that's when she decided to make a huge career change.

“I started my business in 2020, it actually felt like this was my passion, it all just came to me so naturally,” says Pautassi.

At the end of 2020, she decided to launch her own business, but before doing so, she wanted to test the waters. So she decided to keep her corporate job, but on the side, start up her own business.

She still loved the marketing aspect of her job and the source of income it provided. However, she found that while starting her business and still working her corporate job at fewer hours, she was holding



Ana Pautassi took a leap of faith and started her own business at the end of 2020.

back from reaching her full potential.

It wasn't until the end of 2021, that she decided to take the leap of faith. “I decided to leave the corporate world behind,” explains Pautassi. “Even when you have another source of income coming in,

it's like a safety net. It was time to take the risk and leave.”

Once Pautassi put all her energy into her own business, she began to experience the career freedom she has always wanted.

Her business Dreaming Big



Ana Pautassi has chosen her own path and has the career freedom she has always wanted with her business Dreaming Big Lifestyle.

Lifestyle offers a variety of different types of lifestyles and business coaching. Her business provides *VIP coaching* through services such as the *Nomad Living*, which is a four-month one-on-one program focused on creating and growing a business through marketing strategies and mindset shifts that can also transform your life.

She also provides planning sessions, which involve a 90-minute phone call where


Pautassi will offer a step-by-step action plan that will best help the client achieve their goals, what resources they will need to do this, map out their business, and how to get past any obstacles that are

“I wanted to build a brand where I can be my authentic self, while helping others reach their full potential as well.”

currently getting in their way.

Pautassi’s website also provides self-paced courses and coaching sessions with various tools clients can choose from. “I infused my ten-plus years of marketing, mindset work and everything I know to help them reach their goals quicker through a mentor,” says Pautassi. “I wanted to build a brand where I can be my authentic self, while helping others reach their full potential as well.”

In addition to her services, she incorporates her love for travel, food, lifestyles, and business into her blog.

With her leap of faith, there was no guarantee, but Pautassi took the risk to become an entrepreneur, and it paid off. Becoming an entrepreneur gave her the freedom to choose what career she wanted and how she wanted to live her life. She’s proven it’s always possible to chase your dreams and leave that nine-to-five job that was never meant to be. Her story proves that you can achieve success by being your own boss and taking control of your narrative. 

Check out
Durham
Colleges 140+
programs on
DC’s website.

**VISIT DC
WEBSITE**

Work your way up to the top

By Lauren Morrison

What started out as a dream has since become his reality. Dylan McLean, a 2019 Durham College (DC) electrical engineering graduate, grew up certain that he wanted to be an electrician. From assisting in construction jobs with his father, to working his way up the trades ladder, McLean is now the founder of his own contracting company based in Burketon, Ont., McLean General Contracting (MGC). With a vision in mind and the skills to make a name for himself, McLean graduated college ready to kick-start his career.

Enrolled in 2016, he spent two years studying in DC's Electrical Engineering Technician program, followed by another year in the college's trades school. He found that the first program offered exactly what he needed to possess the necessary skills of an entrepreneur in the field. With its lessons ranging from basic perception of the craft and hands-on projects, to more intricate concepts like blueprints and



McLean General Contracting provides high-quality services in every job. Established in 2022, the company has a mission to expand their work province-wide. (McLean)

job pricing, McLean became knowledgeable of the trade and was capable of running his own jobs in no time.

"It started everything for me," he says. "Durham's electrical program really helped me get more involved in things outside of a basic electrical job and opened

a lot of doors as for what I could do." After gaining the essential qualities of a well-taught electrician, McLean was determined to start something of his own. He knew what it took to be successful in the contracting realm and began the process of boosting his professional image.

Building clientele and executing small jobs at first, his journey to create a reputable business demanded patience to achieve excellence. With a goal of leaving college knowing more than he did going in, McLean's company has been led by strong values and motivation from the very beginning.

"It's about who you know," says McLean. "Having a reliable client base that trusts you to do solid work is what grows your business when you're starting out."

“Having a reliable client base that trusts you to do solid work is what grows your business when you're starting out.”

At McLean General Contracting, it is his team's mission to provide an extensive skill set to compliment any job that a customer may request. Doing "a little bit of everything," McLean himself focuses mainly on electrical tasks but can also be



McLean's team's work on interior home renovations are known for their clean and modern look. Using mixed mediums to give clients' spaces a new sense of character, the final results of MGC's projects are always worth their while. (Unknown)

“Durham’s electrical program really helped me get more involved in things outside of my basic job.”

recognized for his company's expertise among interior and exterior home renovations.

As the leader of MGC's projects, McLean guides his team in their work to ensure things are up to standard and being performed efficiently.

“I loved learning from him,” said Cameron Lowery, McLean's former employee. “His leadership as a boss was always hands-on and he was

great at helping the younger guys, like me, get to know their way around a site and overall, do great work.”

As for the future of McLean's company, expansion is a prominent factor. He plans to gain a wider client base and even travel province-wide to deliver his contracting services to new demographics.


Generating growth with a positive reputation will

continue to be an important element in McLean's professional strategy, alongside the goal of doing contract work with other well-known companies.

Many people aspire to be their own boss yet lack the determination to bring their dream to fruition.

For McLean, it was the driving factor behind starting his contracting company and

what stood out to him when choosing his career.

In just a few years, he has already made great strides in the establishment of his business by producing exceptional home repairs and restorations but plans to increase MGC's development even further. With the right mixture of passion and drive, working your way up to the top can turn dreams into reality. 

The busy life of a student-athlete

By Joshua Clarke

Student life can be stressful but adding a sport can increase your workload and keep you even busier than the average student. Student-athletes often must stay on campus even after class to attend practice, games, physical therapy sessions, specialized training, and much more. This can be a considerable amount to put on some people, but it all comes with signing up for the extra-curricular sport that you choose.

Guedeï Djimi, captain of the Durham Lords Men's Soccer team stepped up to the plate to become a student-athlete in 2022. He is also in his second year of the PR and Strategic Communications program at the college, learning more about the potential career, he hopes to incorporate his learnings with his personal business All BLK Market, which is an e-commerce platform that showcases black-owned businesses as well as connecting aspiring entrepreneurs to professionals. In this line of work, he has

an extensive background in entrepreneurship and is looking to further propel his future in the direction that he wants it to go.

Born in Chad in 1994 but raised in Canada, Djimi has previous post-secondary experience, specifically at Centennial College, but when asked about why he chose Durham College the second time around, he stated that "It wasn't much of a hard decision.". Durham was where he resides and he wanted to build on his connections in the area. Additionally, due to his business being based in the GTA, he believed the connections he could make around the Durham Region could potentially be crucial to the growth of his business.

"It never felt like it was out of my way to do something," says Djimi, "It was something that was in me." Djimi shows his passion for soccer, and most importantly his passion to succeed. Djimi has the drive to succeed and is able to put his mind to anything that comes in his way. Knowing that he is

a leader by example by being the captain of his team, Djimi knows that younger people and recent high school graduates joining him on DC's soccer team, he needs to set the best example he can so that the others can follow closely behind. The characteristics of being a leader also follow him

outside of his school, sports, and personal business.

Knowing that he is a leader by example by being the captain of his team, Djimi knows that younger people and recent high school graduates joining him on DC's soccer team,



Djimi is a passionate leader by example

Photo credits: Joshua Clarke

him on DC's soccer team, he needs to set the best example he can so that the others can follow closely behind.

The characteristics of being a leader also follow him outside of his school, sports, and personal business. Even with his normal everyday job, he still must bear responsibility for the shifts that he chooses to work, school comes first, and his ability to build his packed schedule around this shows the strength of his time-management skills.

The combination of all these traits is what holds Djimi together, and he heavily credits his first year at Durham College for his success so far. We also spoke about Djimi reaching out to sponsors regarding his business and how punctuality and communication are key when speaking on a business level, his end goal after school with his career stems around event management, fitting his friendly, intelligent personality very well.

In summer 2022 his organization held an event called "BLK Friday" where he further showcased even more black-owned businesses

and gave small creators the platform that they needed to show off their work and create even more connections.

"It never felt like it was out of my way to do something, It was something that was in me."

Ensuring that everybody succeeds and thrives is a heavy part of Djimi's personality and will most definitely result in good karma for his future. Djimi's dedication and hard work will prevail one day, and with his graduation date coming closer, more doors will open for the talented young man. 🍀

Check out Djimi's
Organization



Instagram:
[@allblkmarket](https://www.instagram.com/allblkmarket)



Photo Credit: Durham College
Djimi has played against many soccer teams, semi-professionally and casually

Connecting sportsmanship, leadership and community

By Leah Drewette

Photos by Leah Drewette

Durham College (DC) alumnus of the Human Resources — Business Administration program and former professional cyclist Kyle Douglas embraces challenge and channels his leadership and sportsmanship into serving his community.

After racing professionally all over the world, Douglas returned home to Whitby, Ont., and pursued business studies at DC where he fell in love with human resources (HR).

To Douglas, high-performance athletes and high-performance employees show stark similarities—both strive to be the best at what they do through hard work, reflection, and constant improvement. Aligning with his values and experiences, HR was his calling and continues to be his passion.

“My introduction to HR was

doing performance appraisals and reviews,” Douglas says. “And I asked, ‘Why do companies only do this once a year? In sport, you do it every day.’”

During his second year, Douglas joined his family’s business, CRCS DKI, a Durham residential and commercial emergency cleanup and disaster restoration company. With CRCS General Contractors established by his parents in the ‘70s and eventually merging with Disaster Kleenup International (DKI) the abbreviation for CRCS remains a secret.

“It’s a running joke in the family,” Douglas laughs, “but we’re just CRCS DKI, everywhere.”

Specializing in damage caused by inclement weather, oil spills, sewer damage, break-ins, mould and asbestos, CRCS DKI responds to 100 to 150 disasters per month with occasional waves of events that make for especially busy times.



Kyle Douglas gives a tour of his office in Oshawa, Ont., where the back of a restored 1922 fire truck with a CRCS license plate is on display.

“We’ve had many busy workdays with a multitude of catastrophes,” Douglas says.

“We’ve seen multiple losses. You have to mentally prepare yourself for that.”

Now partner and vice president of operations, Douglas does HR, strategic planning, information technology (IT) management, and fleet services management. With his brothers, Matt and Ryan Douglas, they are now two years into a multi-year buyout of the business.

While CRCS keeps him on his toes, Douglas is also in his eighth year on the board of directors at the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce. In 2019 and at the age of 32, he served as the youngest president in the history of the Chamber. In total, Douglas has been involved for nine years and received mentorship by Former Chamber CEO and DC alumnus Nancy Shaw.

“We’ve seen multiple losses. You have to mentally prepare yourself for that.”

Shaw recalls the closing of operations at the General Motors Oshawa Assembly during Douglas’ presidency at the end 2019. When the Chamber had duty to be front facing with media,



Kyle Douglas walks through the CRCS DKI warehouse in Oshawa, Ont.

Douglas stepped up to offer reassurance to Oshawa.

“We knew we needed to be ground zero for media,” Shaw says. “We had every outlet you can imagine there. He did

fantastic. He threw his whole self into it. He shows what a well-rounded leader he really is.”

With his brothers, Douglas also rides his bike annually

for the Lakeridge Health Foundation (LHF). In 2021, they raised \$22,000 for mental health services and were awarded the Community Champion award at the Unite 2021 Small Business Conference. In January of 2022, they rode for the Our Cancer Campaign with Very Important Peddlers (VIP) and raised over \$34,000 for LHF.

“He shows what a well-rounded leader he really is.”

Douglas connects sportsmanship and leadership to all aspects of his life. Through his ascendancy at CRCS DKI, influence at the Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce and by applying his cycling athleticism into community fundraising efforts, Douglas is a champion of Durham Region and a revered alumnus of DC—and the feelings are mutual.

“DC opened up my eyes,” Douglas says. “I found the pathway I wanted because I was given that opportunity at the college.” 🏆

Durham College's employees lead the way with Innovate@DC

Story and photos by Dazy

Have you ever looked for a place where you could freely express your thoughts and ideas on how to improve where you work? Durham College's *Innovate@DC* is one such all-exclusive idea management platform which is available to all Durham College (DC) workers, including work-study students to promote departmental collaboration through connecting staff at Durham College.

“While working on a project, it becomes really difficult to find complete information. I use it to connect to people and interview them for informational purposes.”

With 2,300 employees, 195 active users, and 196 idea submissions, *Innovate@*



Melissa Pringle is one of system administrators of *Innovate@DC* which started in October 2021. She works for the Office of the President at Durham College as well.

DC has helped improve employee relations by creating a welcoming environment for staff to interact.

“There was no hidden agenda,” says Melissa Pringle, System Administrator, *Innovate@DC*, “It was really spurred with the idea of just starting a conversation and seeing where the conversation

goes. So, if at the end of the day nothing happens other than cross-college dialogue, we consider that to be success of *Innovate@DC*.”

The president's office established the Innovation and Disruption Catalyst Group (IDCG) in 2021. The president established this team of employees to operate as a

subset of participants of all DC employees. Durham College President Don Lovisa intended to initiate a discussion on altering the organizational culture of DC by pulling together a group of individuals who often interacted with each other. To encourage discussions on innovation and disruption at the college, *Innovate@DC* was founded. Currently, it is funded by the Office of the President.

“Out of all the users who are engaging with the website by making a comment or providing an idea, the president himself is an active user of *Innovate@DC*,” adds Pringle. “Don himself encourages participants by starting a conversation, tagging people and making comments on others' posts.”

People put up their ideas on *Innovate@DC* to collaborate with other staff members. Posting recommendations on how DC could perhaps teach students about food literacy

and food insecurity is one example of the initiatives being discussed.

Durham College's internal communication has transformed because of *Innovate@DC*'s #ShareYourStory, Coffee and Conversation and Think Tank sessions, which are annual events.

One of the most widely attended events in 2021 was Think Tank. During the event, employees gathered for a half-day session where individuals hear from one another and contribute to conversations pertaining Durham College's ongoing activities. The next event is slated for March 2023 and will be called Think Tank 2.0.

"We've got a number of ongoing initiatives," adds Holly Tyson, system administrator of *Innovate@DC*. "One of our really successful and popular ones is that we host Coffee and Conversation sessions. It gives DC employees a chance to come together in a casual space and have a coffee and a bite to eat and talk about some of the ideas that are on the platform and ways that we can support them."

Apart from the events,



Melissa Pringle and Holly Tyson plans events like Think Tank, Coffee and Conversation sessions, and periodic culture surveys.

Innovate@DC has given employees across the college a break from their work routines. It has helped a lot of employees make work connections across both of the campuses, and complete their research and other tasks for a project.

"I think it's a great addition

to the college," says Lucy Romao Vandepol, member of Innovation and Disruption Catalyst Group. "It is a great platform for employees to share and collaborate on ideas"

In this fast-paced world, great ideas can come from unlikely sources to make a big

difference. *Innovate@DC* wishes to find collaborators, trends, technology and resources who can be or contribute to the change in the near future. 🌱

