



## Slave Lake student earns silver at 2010 Regional Skills Canada Competition

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*SLAVE LAKE, AB* – A Slave Lake welding student from Roland Michener Secondary School (RMSS) will proudly carry the torch for his school and community during the 2010 Provincial Skills Competition at Northlands AgriCom in Edmonton May 12-13. Alex Plourde, an 18-year-old Grade 12 RAP (Registered Apprenticeship Program) student at RMSS, earned the right to compete at next month's prestigious provincial competition after finishing in second place overall at the 2010 Regional Skills Canada Competition hosted by Portage College in Lac La Biche on April 22.



Alex Plourde, RMSS student in Slave Lake.

“Alex’s silver medal is well deserved. He’s extremely dedicated and has a great work ethic,” says Plourde’s welding instructor, Ken McKen of Northern Lakes College in Slave Lake.

What’s even more impressive is the fact that he accomplished the feat with only four months of experience in welding under his belt.

“To emphasize just how well Alex did, I think it is important to note that this was the third year in a row in which the gold medalist, Dillon Hebert of Portage College, has finished first,” McKen explains. “Finishing second behind someone of that caliber is impressive to say the least.”

Plourde’s challenge as one of 11 participants at the recent regional competition involved a six-hour welding project (including orientation) which was judged on looks, structural integrity and workmanship. When the results were announced, Plourde found himself sitting near the top of the pack in second place overall.

Plourde, who will graduate from RMSS this year, says winning silver at the regional skills competition was both exciting and shocking.

“In all honesty, I really wasn’t expecting to finish with the silver medal. I don’t think anyone was more surprised than me,” says a soft-spoken Plourde.

The one individual who was not surprised by the young welding apprentice's second place performance was McKen – an experienced professional welder who's seen more than his fair share of talent as a volunteer on the Skills Canada Alberta Provincial Technical Committee. He says he recognized Plourde's amazing skill and talent as a welder the very first time they met as instructor and student.

"I knew right from day one that Alex had a special talent for the welding trade. He was a pure natural at it, which isn't exactly something you see every day as an instructor," says McKen, who is attending next month's provincial competition as Plourde's coach.

All gold and silver medalists at the Regional Skills Canada Competition move on to compete at the Provincial Skills Competition in Edmonton next month. The event will see students vie to win the honour of being crowned the best in their chosen discipline.

A win at the provincial event earns competitors a spot on Team Alberta at the Canadian Skills Competition May 20-23, 2010 in Waterloo, Ont. – a scenario which is a real possibility for the young up-and-coming welder from Slave Lake.

"Alex, in my opinion, has the potential to turn a lot of heads based upon his knowledge and keen understanding of the welding trade," says McKen. "I feel quite confident saying his strong result at the Regional Skills Canada Competition is a sign of bigger and better things to come."

Best described as the "Olympics of Trade," the Provincial Skills Competition invites youth from across Alberta, representing high school and post-secondary levels, to compete in a variety of trade and technical events. During the two-day competition, each student specializes in one event area and must complete a project that has been designed by experts in that field.

The philosophy of the Provincial Skills Competitions is to reward students for excellence. The competitions also directly involve industry leaders in the evaluation of student performance to help ensure training is relevant to employers' needs.

Gold medalists at the provincial competition are further rewarded with a selection to Team Alberta and an opportunity to showcase their skills at the Canadian Skills Competition. This annual event rotates its location throughout Canada.

Every two years Skills Canada selects Team Canada to represent the nation at the World Skills Competition. Last year's event was held in Calgary, AB.

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