

Moncton Teacher honoured with top Canadian Geography Literacy Award

OTTAWA, ON, November 12, 2015 — Zach Vanthournout developed an appreciation of geography after seeing the world on tours of duty in Kosovo, Alert and Afghanistan with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. After Afghanistan, Vanthournout wanted a change. It seemed natural to pursue a second career teaching Canadian kids the love of geography. “I want my students to know their country so they can appreciate what we have,” says Zach Vanthournout. “I really enjoy coming up with new techniques to trigger their interest about the physical world around them. Hopefully one day they’ll become stewards to protect it.”

Vanthournout, a teacher at Moncton High School, develops ingenious ways to get his students hooked on geography. It is not out of the ordinary for Zach to lead a class on a GPS exercise using the technology to play maze games, before leading them through a treasure hunt. The exercise involves using a dash of creative thinking together with math problem solving skills to locate the way points. Vanthournout has raised over \$60,000 in grants to buy tools such as GPS units to support his experiential learning activities. When he gets to teach geography students flock to his classes because they’re cool - he’s getting a reputation among colleagues for his successful teaching methods. His professional development sessions on a wide range of geographic topics are always packed. It appears that combining fieldwork and technology is what geographic literacy looks like in the 21st century.

Zach Vanthournout’s efforts to boost geographic learning may one day help his students to find good paying jobs. Geomatics, or the discipline of gathering, storing, processing, and delivering geographic information, is one of the fastest growing sectors of the information-based economy. Canada’s geomatics industry is comprised of approximately 2500 firms across the country, with revenues of nearly \$2.5Billion.

Zach Vanthournout’s support for the advancement of geographic education in Canada has won him The Royal Canadian Geographical Society’s (RCGS) [2015 Geographic Literacy Award](#) . “Zachary has been described as a ‘lone voice’ advocate for geographic education in New Brunswick,” says Connie Wyatt Anderson, Chair of [Canadian Geographic Education](#) . “His advocacy for increased geographic learning in the province is legendary.”

The Geographic Literacy Award is comprised of a medal and \$2,500, split evenly between the recipient and a donation to support geographic education in their name.. It recognizes an outstanding contribution to geographic education in Canada and will be presented by The Honourable Nellie Taptaqut Kusugak, Commissioner of Nunavut at a medal ceremony on November 18. The ceremony will be attended by celebrated authors Margaret Atwood and Graeme Gibson who will be receiving the Society’s [Gold Medal](#). The ceremony precedes the RCGS College of Fellows dinner taking place at the [Canadian Museum of History](#) in Gatineau, across from Parliament Hill.

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