News Release

Calgary teacher wins national award for Innovation in Geography Teaching

OTTAWA, Ont., Nov. 10, 2016 — Greg Neil is inspired by Canada’s geography. This is a man who biked from Victoria, B.C., to St. John’s, N.L., for fun. He’s also a mountain climber, a remote responder and has avalanche risk management training for which only advanced snow sport athletes need apply. As an educator, Neil takes his life skills, experience and enthusiasm, and his “what’s behind that mountain peak” way of thinking to inspire students to ask smart geographical questions that impact their world today. For his dedication and ingenuity in geographical teaching, Neil has won one of Canada’s top medals in education, the Innovation in Geography Teaching Award.

“I am extremely honoured to receive this award from Canadian Geographic Education and am thrilled to be recognized as an innovative geography teacher,” says Greg Neil. “I look forward to using my passion for geography to exploring a variety of geospatial tools to help my students not only understand important geographical concepts but also inspire in them the same passion.”

Neil is known for taking his geography teaching to the next level and his students are in turn winning recognition for their work. One group of Neil’s Grade 5 students built a complex scale-model of Calgary’s Weaselhead Flats natural area that boasted a working river flowing into a reservoir — all powered by a bicycle-powered generator to demonstrate the history and ecological diversity of the greenspace. To deepen understanding about the Northern Gateway Pipeline, Neil’s Grade 7 students created another large-scale model to demonstrate the proposed pipeline’s route. The accompanying multimedia presentation used GIS technology to show the ecological regions, First Nations communities and other geographical information. These projects are examples of how Neil takes the geographical issues facing us now and teaches his students to use 21st-century tools to get the answers and understanding necessary to develop informed opinions about the world.

The Innovation in Geography Teaching Award is given to educators who go above and beyond to foster geographic engagement and enhance their students’ geographic literacy. For Connie Wyatt Anderson, Chair of Canadian Geographic Education, Neil was an obvious choice for Canada’s highest K-12 award for geography teaching. “Greg Neil is the perfect candidate for the 2016 Innovation in Geography Teaching Award. His teaching style keeps students engaged and able to contribute intelligently to the most pressing geographical issues facing today’s world. Canada is better because of teachers like him.”

Calgarians seem to embrace and excel at all things geography. For two years running, a Calgary student has won Canada’s top geography quiz, the Canadian Geographic Challenge (Calgary students have often made it into the top five.) Calgary also has the highest number of Canada’s top living explorers, and local teachers like Greg Neil are clearly having an impact. Could there be something in the water?

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