

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Gimli's Johnson gets nod as young global citizen

By Jim Mosher

Bradley Johnson, 18, says we all need to take a broader view of our lives, particularly what we consume and how we interact with one another.

Johnson was recently named one of eight young global citizens in Manitoba, an honour awarded by the Manitoba Council on International Cooperation (MCIC).

He's now studying business at the University of Manitoba after graduating from Gimli High School. His work in school and the wider community has won him acclaim and kudos.

Johnson was a founding member of Gimli Youth Community Partnership (YCP), a student-led initiative which formed in June 2006. YCP and its members have been the recipients of numerous awards.

Johnson won the nod from his Gimli YCP colleagues to sit as a youth representative on Gimli municipal council.

"I had a neat experience with that," Johnson says in a video interview posted on MCIC's website. "I think I was able to bring some interesting issues to the table and speak to some things that would never have come up otherwise."

But it was YCP's work on fair trade that seems to have galvanized a more global view. Johnson was a leader in this initiative, as were others in the youth group.

Gimli would be declared a Fair Trade Town July 1, 2009. "It was something we were all really proud of," Johnson says of winning a designation that's only held by half a dozen



File/John Coward

A celebration was held last July at the New Iceland Heritage Museum to mark Gimli's designation as a fair trade town. Johnson, center, is flanked by Gimli Coun. Ross Bailey (from left), Gimli MLA Peter Bjornson, Ian Goodall-George, then of East Interlake Community Futures, and Zack Gross, a YCP adult mentor and outreach coordinator with the Manitoba Council on International Cooperation.

communities in Canada.

That would be a beginning both for the community and YCP. As Johnson explains in his video interview, the fair trade designation continues to act as an impetus to bring in more fair trade products. And it's a way to

encourage people to think more about what they consume.

"Right now I'm mostly interested in fair trade, and the idea around consumerism and doing things fairly," says the business student. "Mostly, I'd like to see people become

more engaged. They can do so just by taking the time to educate themselves, by thinking internationally rather than just in terms of their own community."

He amplifies that message for young people.

"I think what I'd say to the youth today is: Take the time to educate yourself and become aware of the issues."

Johnson says his interest in business studies is motivated by a desire to finetune the fair trade model.

YOUTH VOICE IMPORTANT

Gimli Mayor Tammy Axelsson says youth involvement on council and in the community are key strengths that should be nurtured.

"They come with such energy and optimism," the mayor said Tuesday. "All of the kids who have been involved are just really remarkable. There's just so many of them. They've all made their contributions."

Axelsson says she hopes future councils will keep a place at the table for a youth representative "to really listen to what youth think is important."

"I hope they always have that voice at the council table," the mayor said. "I think it's so important."