

# MAC presents art awards

## Gravenhurst High School students honoured

Muskoka Arts & Crafts is pleased to announce the winners of the 2008 Jean E. MacDonald Memorial Award and the Silver Bridge Gallery Student Art Award - 2D.

These awards are given annually to graduating high school students in Muskoka who are pursuing a post-secondary education in the visual arts.

The Jean E. MacDonald Memorial Award was established in 1988 and since then, 24 students have been recognized for their artistic potential.

This year, all the applicants demonstrated a high level of creativity, thus making the jury's decision a challenging job. After thoughtful deliberations, the jury selected Brynn Higgins-Stirrup of Gravenhurst to receive the \$1,200 Jean E. MacDonald Memorial Award.

Higgins-Stirrup intends to pursue a career in which she can be a deliberate and positive force in society.

"To me, art is a vehicle for change, truth and thought — a means to ask the questions and say the things that cannot be spoken or written down," remarked the

thoughtful young woman who hopes that, through her art, people will be inspired and be helped to believe in something beyond their own lives.

Higgins-Stirrup studied art at Gravenhurst High School where, in her final year, she participated in an art show that was critiqued by professional artists in Muskoka. At the show, she was successful in selling one of her paintings to another local artist.

Over the semester, she took part in the Life Drawing Open Studio held weekly at MAC's Chapel Gallery in Bracebridge. From September to January 2007, Higgins-Stirrup's co-op placement was as a studio assistant at Amanda Greavette's studio. Early this year, she participated in the young artists' show, *Ardour Eruption* at Chancery Gallery in Bracebridge. In addition to selling a painting, she won the JBS Art Scholarship for Best in Show.

Higgins-Stirrup was accepted to all three universities she applied to for fine art: Queen's, Concordia and Ottawa. It was the Canadian University Study Abroad program offered through Queen's University that won her over. This fall, she will spend the first year of her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree at the International Study Centre at Herstmonceux Castle, Hailsham in East Sussex, England. While at university, she plans to focus on painting and drawing, then possibly continuing to earn a master's degree. After her formal education is completed, this she dreams of working as a professional artist in Canada and to support herself through her work.

"I really want to have a life of art," says Higgins-Stirrup. "I believe with a post-secondary education,

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I will improve my technical skills incredibly, have the opportunity to travel, meet people involved in the art world and gain life experience which will be invaluable to the quality of my work. It will allow me a firm foundation to reach my potential as an artist and a person."

The Silver Bridge Gallery Student Art Award - 2D, which is a \$150 cash award sponsored by Michelle Hallam, went to Erin Cunningham of Gravenhurst.

For Cunningham, art is not simply the finished product. Rather, it is the process as well as the emotions evoked when it is viewed.

"Sometimes the most important impact comes from the feeling and the passion of the artist's soul that went into the drawing or the painting or even the simple sketch," said Cunningham. "Every line, every brush stroke conveys personal emotions. Through my own art, I intend to try to do the same."

It has been Cunningham's dream to attend art school. She has a deep passion for drawing and has dedicated much of her time into its practice. It was high school art classes that introduced her to a variety of techniques, styles, media and ideas that influenced and shaped her work.

"Over the last four years of my high school career, I believe my greatest achievement has been how much I have personally discovered

about myself as a person and artist," said Cunningham.

During her last year at Gravenhurst High School, she began publicly displaying her work and was encouraged when she sold some of her paintings. Cunningham attended the weekly evening sessions of the Life Drawing Open Studio at Chapel Gallery and, for the past two years, has volunteered her artistic skills in decorating for the Gravenhurst Rotary Gala. Cunningham's academic standing reflects her dedication and desire for knowledge. Throughout high school, she consistently achieved the Principal's Honour Roll.

This fall, Cunningham will attend Ryerson University in Toronto for interior design.

"It is my desire to design. I love to imagine and create ideal perfection and I hope that through interior design, I will get the opportunity to fulfil the dreams of others and, in the process, fulfil my own dreams," said Cunningham. "I have a desire to better the lives of those around me and the world. I hope that through my studies, I am given the opportunity to see more of the world. I wish to learn as much as I can and develop my skills to the best of my ability."

Muskoka Arts & Crafts acknowledges the talents of all the students who applied and wish them all the very best as they pursue their chosen fields.