



A student of MANS' musical sign language group Total Praise waits to perform during the Milestone Celebration. Photo: Kelly Dreger

Brayden Omeasoo-Steinhaur conducted a special music contribution from Total Praise, MANS' sign language musical group. Brayden, a Grade 8 student and assistant director of the group, can be seen performing solo in a video at www.albertaadventist.ca.



Milestone Celebration Celebrates Alberta Adventist Founders and First Grade 12 Graduating Class

Despite surprise snow and treacherous roads on April 25, Church in Canada officers, returning founders, teachers, and friends packed the school gym of Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS) for its Milestone Celebration & Open House. The theme, "Hats Off to You" celebrated 12 years at the school's location and MANS' first Grade 12 graduating class, but the focus was clearly on the Alberta Adventist community and the church members who laid the school's strong foundation and made Alberta's mission school milestones possible.

The afternoon of celebration, reflection, and entertainment included a meal, a performance by MANS' musical sign language group, Total Praise (video of Assistant Director, student Brayden

Omeasoo-Steinhaur at www.albertaadventist.ca), and a short video history of the school's development entitled "We've Come so Far" collapsed years into minutes, bringing back memories for many, including Pat and Victor Latoski.

Teamwork with Solid Results

The Latoskis, who've donated their time and skills to at least ten church projects, helped build the present MANS building. While working on a building project in Oregon, they spoke with their mission-minded counterparts about MANS, Canada's only mission school. When the group was finished in Oregon, it traveled to Alberta, working on the trusses in the gym for two weeks—the same gym in which the Latoskis were

now celebrating the spirit of Mamawi Atosketan (Cree for "working together") that characterized the volunteers.

Victor remembers the challenges that the MANS project manager faced. The volunteer labour wasn't always consistent, but volunteers never failed to deliver selfless, serving attitudes and the ability to work together for a deserving cause.

Returning to the school to celebrate 12 years of student education and growth was a highlight for the Latoskis. "We had a great experience," says Victor. "You filled the auditorium to overflowing—very impressive. The kids seem very happy. We went to look at some classrooms and they were so well-maintained. They all look good. Everybody's 'with it!'"

Hats Off to Alberta Adventists

MANS has been able to thrive because of the support of mission-minded donors like the Latoskis and other Alberta Conference church members. Students were not shy about expressing their appreciation.

Medallions beaded by Grade 10 student Krista Abt, a student at MANS since Grade 1, were presented: for "Time Invested" to developer/contractor Alfred Breikreuz (Ponoka) and developer/contractor, Ken Taylor (Camrose); for "Talent Invested" to Sandra Kiehlbach Toms, who was the founding teacher/principal of the school at its first location on the Reserve in 1985; and for "Treasure Invested" to Lacombe resident Elizabeth Tym as representative of deceased founding donor Mary Kryswaty (also of Lacombe).



Alfred Breikreuz accepts a hand-beaded medallion thank you award from MANS student Krista Abt and SDACC President Mark Johnson thanking him and Ken Taylor for their donations of time and labour in overseeing the construction of the school.



Elizabeth Tym accepts a hand-beaded medallion as a thank you award on behalf of Mary Kryswaty from SDACC President Mark Johnson and MANS student Krista Abt, who created the medallions.

First Teacher Returns

Toms, who lives in Calgary, expressed amazement at the school's transformation from a one-room school with 17 students to a complete K-12 school that is bursting at the seams. "You do your little bit, and wonder whether you make any difference—like tossing a marble into a pond," said Toms. "But when many people toss in their marble, look what it can become!"

An Attitude of Gratitude

Students presented customized MANS mugs packaged with a variety of cookies made by Grade 2 and 3 students to those who contributed labour or cash to construct the present building. Handmade thank you cards with personalized messages from Mamawi



Camrose Rotarian Ron Grue recently helped William Piersanti and Steven Van Rensberg complete an addition to MANS that created enough additional space to allow MANS' first Grade 12 students to complete high school in June of 2015.



Pat and Victor Latoski raise their hands, in the school gymnasium they helped construct 12 years prior, at the Milestone Celebration with those who contributed donations of labour to MANS' construction in 2003.

students were displayed on tables.

One Grade 5 student wrote, "Thank you for helping me have a safe place to go to school. Thank you for building our school. We love our school. We all love you for making our school."

A recently-completed addition to the existing facility, added through generous donations of labour from Camrose Rotarian Ron Grue and Calgary contractor William Piersanti, created enough additional space to allow MANS' first Grade 12 students to complete high school in June of 2015.

Thank you for helping me have a safe place to go to school. Thank you for building our school. We love our school. We all love you for making our school.
Grade 5 student

A Reason to Grow

Principal Gail Wilton explains the reason for expanding to Grade 12. "By carrying students from Kindergarten through to the completion of Grade 12, the school can also provide direction to students for college and higher education opportunities."

The current high school completion rate among First Nations youth across Canada is 39% of those who register for high school. MANS supporters believe that by extending the unique learning environment that has allowed students to score above average on Alberta Standardized tests, MANS students will far exceed national graduation rates. This year's 100% completion rate is a good start.

MANS is dedicated to providing an excellent Seventh-day Adventist academic program that respects and responds to each student's cultural and academic needs within a safe and caring Christian environment, while providing opportunities for each student to grow in God's love. MANS is on its way to becoming a model of First Nations education noted for exceeding and changing cultural expectations.

—By Melissa Meyers & Lynn McDowell
Photos by Kelly Dreger