

## 2018 RECL Alumni Day Guest Speakers

**Grayson Burke**, Director and Co-founder of Cedar Ridge Camp. Previously employed at Kilcoo, Wahanowin, and Kandalore Camp. Also employed at the Royal Caribbean.

I was at Brock from 1999-2003. I graduated in 2003.

To date, my proudest accomplishment is helping to create a Cedar Ridge Community.

One of my favourite memories are Brock was our 3<sup>rd</sup>-year winter camp trip and other field trips.

If I were to give advice to soon-to-be RECL alumni, I would suggest getting multiple experiences within your field and making positive connections.

**Katherine Plested**, Therapist at St. Joseph's Health Care London. Formerly employed at North Bay General Hospital.

I attended Brock University in 2003, graduated in 2007 from BRLS with a specialization in Therapeutic Recreation. I ended my Brock Degree with a placement in Halifax, NS working at the Capital Health QEII - rehab hospital.

I am proud to be part of implementing the Leisure Well Being Model into our Long-Term Care facility, which altered the service delivery to the residents. Additionally, I am proud that our first wish (Wishing Well Program) was granted in December 2017. CTV London chose to share our resident's story on the evening news. Finally, I am proud to be the President Elect for Therapeutic Recreation Ontario (TRO) - I will become President of TRO in about six months.

The memories that I have of Brock overflow my glass. I always appreciated the open-door policy the professors at Brock showed. On memory specific to the RECL program would be Dr. Suzie Lane, who asked her students to stand up and roll like tumbleweeds right in the middle of class. And the RECL socials, specifically the one at Kagoonville...let's just say the pictures help fill in the memories!

The advice that I would give to a graduating student is to follow your passion and your values. Work in a company and with a population of people who you want to support and help grow. Lastly, have fun! Bring enthusiasm and passion to your job every day, and remember that you work to provide a service to people to make their day better.

**Megan Ransom**, Project Coordinator/Recreation Therapist with Niagara Health in Outpatient Mental Health.

Formerly employed at Syl Apps Youth Centre, Peel Youth Village, and St. Joes Health Care.

I graduated Brock in the fall of 2007, which means I would have begun my journey there in 2003.

I have two proud moments in my career which stand out. One is the establishment of the Brock University and NHS partnership. Just this past October, myself and various other Recreation Therapists were nominated for an Inter-Professional Practice Award for our work in starting this partnership. My other proud moment was in 2014. I was awarded the NHS Award of Excellence in the area of “Building Strong and Successful Relationships,” for a therapeutic running group I began at the hospital.

There are so many fond memories I have of Brock University. I very much enjoyed participating in intramurals, as well as volunteering with the SNAP program. There isn't one memory that stands out, but during my time at Brock I created lasting relationships/friendship, with peers as well as faculty that remain dear to me after all these years.

I would like to tell soon-to-be RECL alumni to be open to any possibility. When I first graduated I didn't know that I would ever end up working in Mental Health. I remained open to working any job, at any wage, to get me the experience I needed. It was this openness that truly allowed me to grow as a professional, and ultimately led me to my love of mental health.

**Kathy Moldenhauer**, Director of Recreation & Culture Department for the City of Niagara Falls. Previously worked Recreation Supervisor and Facility Manager for the City of St. Catharines, and at Brock University as a placement coordinator.

I attended Brock University as a RECL student full time from 1986-1990. In 1993, I began my part-time studies in Business Administration, which I completed in 1999.

My proudest career accomplishment is my 27 years as a team member in the development and opening of the following facilities: Seymour Hannah Sport and Entertainment Complex and adjacent skateboard park, Gale Centre, Niagara Falls History Museum, and various parks, playgrounds and multi-use trails.

One of my favourite memories of Brock was being a part-time instructor on the Ropes Course for three years. We created awesome outdoor adventure learning opportunities. I also really enjoyed Thursday night pub nights at Alphonse's!

The advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL alumni would be to keep your options open, and take chances.

**Andrew Bates**, Assistant Manager of Athletics & Recreation at Conestoga College. Formerly worked as a Recreation Manager of Chicopee Ski & Summer Resort and Business Manager for a sporting good distribution company in Guelph

I studied at Brock University from 2003-2007, graduating in 2007.

I think I have had some accomplishments in each of my roles throughout my career, but if I had to pick one: recently I've received approval for a proposal I wrote to secure capital dollars to enhance our Varsity Game day experience, re-design our fitness centre with new equipment additions, and enhance our coaches room with audio/visual equipment.

One of my favourite memories at Brock was winning the OUA Silver Medal on the Brock Tennis Team. One of my teammates separated his shoulder during the Tie Breaker match, and yet he continued playing and we won, giving us the Silver.

The advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL alumni is if you are unsure of your path, take time and take opportunities to explore your interests and let your career aspirations guide you. The skills you learn during your time as a RECL student at Brock are applicable in many areas of the employment world. With an open mind, you will find your passion and have many challenging and fulfilling experiences along the way that will shape you into the Recreation leader/manager/facilitator you strive to be.

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable!

**Ryan Howard**, Director of Research and Risk Innovation with ALIVE Outdoors in Toronto. Formerly a Lecturer/Assistant Professor for Outdoor Recreation at the University of Northern British Columbia and Lakehead University

I was at Brock from 2007 - 2015. I did my Masters Degree from 2007-2009, taught in the RECL department in 2009/2010 and then completed my PhD at Brock from 2011 - 2015.

My proudest career accomplishment to date is my high-level consulting with national, provincial and regional organizations.

One of my favourite memories of Brock are some of the friendships that I built. The St. Catharines and Niagara region are wonderful places to live.

If I were to give advice to soon-to-be RECL alumni, I would say: don't see the options that people lay in front of you. Rather, dream of where you want to be and what you want to do. You are the only one who is going to make decisions on what you end up doing in life. Your education is only a small part of the potential you have - dream big and show up every day to work hard.

**Katelyn Burns**, Recreation Coordinator for the City of Hamilton. Formerly worked as a Camp Counselor at McMaster University, and a variety of positions with the City of Hamilton.

I started my studies at Brock University in 2011 and graduated in 2015.

In my most recent position, my proudest accomplishment is when I developed a program called *55+ It's Your Day*. This program is a travelling senior's centre that offers a day of dedicated 55+ activities including fitness classes, social programs, and educational workshops. The goal of this program is to help engage isolated seniors in the communities they live and alleviate pressure and waitlists for the Senior Centres. I am extremely proud of the relationships our team built with the patrons, and socialization opportunities the program provided to seniors in the various communities.

My favourite memory at Brock was our 2P00 class trip!

The advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL alumni is apply for everything. Never turn down an opportunity because it is not exactly what you are looking for or your dream job or you feel unqualified. You never know what job will give you a chance and many opportunities although not perfect will help you reach your end goal.

**Laura Rolph**, Recreation Supervisor for Seniors District, City of Hamilton. Prior to this, I have worked for the City of Hamilton in a variety of Recreation positions.

I completed my undergrad in Bachelor of Recreation and Leisure Studies from 2004-2008. I then decided to come back to complete a Master of Arts, which I did from 2013-2017.

My proudest career accomplishment is when I worked as the Therapeutic Recreation Worker for the *Hostels to Home Pilot Project*. I worked with one of our program participants to create the Hamilton Homeless Baseball League.

My favourite memory at Brock would have to be when we went on a trip, away for a weekend for our program planning course where we all got to lead and participate in each other's programs that we had prepared.

I would encourage soon-to-be RECL alumni to stay connected to other students and the faculty.

**Anne Tong**, Recreation Therapist at Pine River Institute. Formerly worked at Boulderz Climbing Centre and Towhee Child Development Institute.

I studied at Brock University from 2013-2015, graduating in 2015. Following this, I completed my MSW at the University of Toronto.

My proudest career accomplishment is seeing youth challenge themselves and take a risk! Things like going on a canoe trip for the first time, facing their fear of heights, making connections with other, or having the courage to be self-reflective.

One of my favourite memories at Brock is the supportive staff in the RECL department, for sure! They were all incredibly approachable. I felt they were genuinely curious about me, my experiences, and hopes for the future. In a round-about way, I was connected to the job I am in now at Pine River through a job I had at a summer residential treatment program for youth with learning disabilities which was forwarded to me by one of my TA's!

The advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL Alumni is knock on a prof's/TA's door, regardless of if they're teaching you or not! If you find yourself curious about them or think they would be curious about you, do it! When you feel doubtful, worried, or stressed, take a deep breath (in through the nose and out through the nose) and take a moment to remind yourself of your strengths and your values.

**Greg Maychak**, Manager of Special Project, City of Hamilton. I've spent my 35-year career with the city of Hamilton, but sport has taken me all over the world and close to 30 countries. Currently, I am a Manager of Special Projects for the City of Hamilton. I was at Brock from 1979 - 1984, graduating in 1984.

To date my proudest career accomplishments have been hosting and being the General Manager for the International Children's Games Millennium Festival in our city where we had 2500 youth, ages 12-15 from close to 100 cities from around the world. Two years later our city won the domestic bid for the 2010 Commonwealth Games over the favored Halifax. Unfortunately we lost the international bid which went to Delhi, India.

One of my favourite memories at Brock was probably, my first week where I made several new friends who I stayed friends with throughout university and some who I still stay in touch with today!

The advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL alumni would be to follow your passion and do something you strongly believe in! It's not always about making a living but rather the journey and your experiences throughout life! You never know how and what positive impact you might have on a fellow human being! What you say and more importantly what you do can have a profound impact while making a big difference in the lives of others!

**Tina VanKuren**, Itinerant Safe Schools Teacher (Gr. K-12) with the Grand Erie District. Formerly worked for the Canadian Deaf-Blind and Rubella Association, Hamilton Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Community Living and Brain Injury Rehabilitation Service Providers/Program, Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital, and Co-owned a Fellowship Home.

I began at Brock in Recreation and Leisure Studies in 1983 and graduated in June 1986 with a dual focus on Therapeutic and Outdoor Recreation. I completed my Bachelor of Arts in Psychology (June 1996). I graduated with a Master of Education. Additionally, I graduated from the Faculty of Education Pre-Service Program with my Bachelor of Education in June 2002.

My proudest career accomplishment has been becoming an elementary teacher and also having the honour of teaching the Therapeutic Benefits of Humour course (RECL 3P23) in the Brock Recreation and Leisure Studies Program on three different occasions. Dr. Ann Marie Guilmette kept asking me!

One of my favourite memories at Brock was meeting Dr. Ann Marie Guilmette in the first year Recreation and Leisure Studies course and then having the amazing pleasure of discovering, 14 years later, that she was a thesis advisor in the Master of Education Program for the research area of humour. This was the focus I had chosen to complete the requirement for that degree.

The main piece of advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL alumni is to always follow your dreams and your passions because you never know the directions your path in life may follow.

**Lucas Cooper**, Program Director at Trails Youth Initiatives. Previously worked at Camp Simpresca, and ALIVE Outdoors Inc, and Wendigo Lake Expeditions.

I started my undergrad at Brock University in 2007 and graduated in 2012. I then went on to complete my Masters, starting in 2012 and graduated in 2014.

My proudest career accomplishment to this date is completing my Master's thesis exploring the experience of re-entry following extended wilderness expeditions.

One of my favourite memories at Brock University is the 2F16 Winter Camping trip.

The advice I would give soon-to-be RECL alumni is to take chances on new opportunities that expand your experience. Learn new fields and ventures that are connected to what interests and drives you. I would also suggest looking for courses and certification to continue to grow your knowledge and perspectives beyond what you gain at Brock.

**Leanne Hughes**, Professional and Education Leader of Recreation Therapy and Coordinator of the Veterans Grant-a-Wish Program at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre.

I attended Brock from 1990 - 1994, graduating in 1994 with my BRLS (Hon). I returned part-time in 1996 and graduated with my M.Ed. in 2002.

Over the years I have enjoyed being part of the Board of Therapeutic Recreation Ontario and I currently hold the position of President. I also teach Foundations of Therapeutic Recreation at Georgian College.

My proudest career accomplishment is the role I have played in developing the Sunnybrook Veterans Grant-a-Wish Program. It is a program that truly focuses on what is meaningful and fulfilling the hopes and dreams of the Veterans.

My favourite memory at Brock was my 4<sup>th</sup> year! The Recreation & Leisure Profs played an integral role in the development of my career path. I also have fond memories of times with friends at Alphie's - friends I still cherish today.

The advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL alumni would be to make a positive first impression. TR is a small field!

**Sarah Demmin**, Coordinator of Therapeutic Recreation Program in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at The College at Brockport, State University of New York. I have also worked as a Recreation Therapist at Sunnybrook Health Science Centre and St. John's Long-Term Care Home.

I began my journey in the Recreation and Leisure Studies program in 1993, graduating with an Honours degree in 1997. I then completed my Masters of Education in Teaching and Learning from 2003 to 2006, while working full-time.

To date, my proudest career accomplishment is teaching and helping students at The College at Brockport. I love seeing students find their passion as Therapeutic Recreation Specialists, and watching them develop from students into proficient practitioners. I love my job!

One of my favourite memories at Brock University is a trip to Penn State University with other 4<sup>th</sup> year students and Dr. John Larson. We all ran on the football field (which no one is supposed to be on except the players), and met Dr. Geoff Godbey! It was a great trip!

The advice I would give to soon-to-be RECL alumni is: do not forget to live the life you promote in your career! Be sure to find balance, and make meaningful leisure a priority in your life as you juggle work, family and all that life demands.

**Beth Astles**, Recreation Therapist for Brain Injury Services.

I was at Brock University from 2005-2008, graduating in the fall of 2008.

One of my proudest accomplishments was moving the group program I am currently working in from a drop-in social program to what it is now - a rehab-oriented, therapeutic-based program. Attendance has doubled! I feel that through my role in the agency I have been able to advocate for the field of Recreation Therapy and moved our program in that direction.

I don't have one specific favourite memory of my time at Brock. I really enjoyed my time as a TA in the faculty. Getting to help students and share my knowledge was beneficial for not just students but for myself. It also allowed me to build relationships and rapport with the professors, which was very helpful for my future career.

I would recommend to soon-to-be RECL alumni to stay in contact with peers and faculty. On numerous occasions, I have reached out to both colleagues and faculty with questions and it has led to a variety of professional opportunities.

**Rebecca Thompson**, Manager of Recreation, Fitness and Creative Arts as well as the Professional Discipline Lead for Recreation Therapy at Homewood Health Centre. Formerly employed at Joseph Brant Hospital.

I was a transfer student from Niagara College, and I graduated in 1998.

I am proud of being awarded grant funding from CMHA Ontario to implement healthy lifestyle programs for individuals with serious mental illnesses and for helping further the TR profession in Ontario by volunteering on the TRO board. I served 9 years, including one term as the "head honcho" (aka "President").

Not sure if this is my favourite memory at Brock, but it sure stands out for me! Spending countless hours in 1997 on my final project for my Internet course where I proudly designed my own website using HTML code. My website was entirely dedicated to the amazingly talented Pearl Jam frontman Eddie Vedder.

The advice I would give to a soon-to-be RECL Grad is get out there and network! Go to conferences, join regional groups, volunteer. Professional networks/relationships can have a powerful impact on your career satisfaction and success!

**Jodi Hendriks**, Culture & Community Enhancement Programmer for the Town of Pelham. Previously employed at the YMCA of Niagara and Worked for the Town of Lincoln.

I began my schooling at Brock in 2007-2011, and graduated in 2011.

One of my proudest career accomplishments to date has been implementing the *Love my Hood* program in Pelham!

A few of my favourite memories of Brock were the friends I made, the professors I had and being involved in Brock Ringette!

The advice I would give to a soon-to-be RECL alumni would be NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK, the more you talk about and are focused on where you want to be, the better! Your coworkers, friends, and family help you get there! Don't be shy!

**Jason Schildroth**, Community Development Coordinator - Arts, Town of Ajax. I have also worked for the Town of Lincoln, the City of Niagara Falls, the City of St. Catharines, and many small towns such as Kincardine.

I did part-time studies from 2003 - 2008 in Classics as well as English while I was trying to figure out my career path and goals. I decided to change gears entirely, and enrolled in college in a recreation studies program. I found my way back to Brock in 2016-2017 via the pathway program for professionals and completed my degree in 2017.

My proudest career moment was in seeing my work in community engagement and policy development come to fruition when the Town of Caledon's Council adopted two keystone policies that I worked very hard with our community organizations to develop. We redesigned our facility access policy, as well as the policy governing the ways in which we support our community non-profit organizations. I don't think I will forget the feeling of walking out of that meeting seeing that both policies were approved, with Council indicating they were very impressed with my work in the community.

My favourite memory of Brock - Graduating!

The advice I would give to soon-to be RECL alumni is to network often, and genuinely. I remember hearing this as a student and kind of rolling my eyes. Trust me when I say you will be surprised in the ways people will come back into your life professionally!

**Sam Dear**, Director at ALIVE Outdoors.

I started a Masters in 2011 and graduated in 2014.

My proudest career accomplishment is the development and facilitation of workshops, programming and consulting related to progressive and ethical engagement with international service/volunteer programs. Additionally, every fall season, uniting a team of over 100 inspiring educators.

My favourite memory of Brock are my TA positions during my Masters, both in the lecture hall and internationally, which played a pivotal role in my development as an educator. The relationships I formed with both students and faculty during these experiences form the foundation of my most cherished memories during my time at Brock.

The advice I would give soon-to-be RECL Alumni is this: Wherever you are, ask yourself two questions. First, am I surrounded by people who inspire me? Second, am I using my potential? If you say no to both questions, you should move on to something different!