

Lonnie Hunter ...

# A Promising Future

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S W I F T C U R R E N T M A L L T

By Gail Jansen



Those who say the youth of today are lacking in values, drive and social responsibility have yet to meet Lonnie Hunter.

At 16 years old, 6'4", blonde and blue-eyed Hunter is the epitome of an average teenager. He loves all sports, hockey particularly. He loves music and plays a variety of instruments and he loves to play paintball and hang out with his friends. Where he differs, is in his drive to make a difference. It is a difference one day he hopes to make as a politician.

At an age when most youths are thinking about nothing more serious than video games and having fun with their friends, Hunter was looking at the world through different eyes.

"Certain social issues have always been very important to me," says Hunter. "And I haven't always agreed with how some of those issues were being dealt with by the government and I thought to myself, 'How can I change this?' 'I started doing some research and found myself getting really interested.'"

While a number of the issues are what Hunter terms political "suicide issues" such as abortion, and age of consent, a number of other issues of interest for him, had to do with the economy and the way the government is run financially.

"When the GST was being lowered, that was something economically that directly affected me and other kids too, and I just found it very interesting the effect that these decisions had."

Last year, at 15, Hunter decided to take that interest a step further, and approached Cypress Hills/Grasslands MP David Anderson, to learn more about politics as a career. "David has been really amazing to me," says Hunter. "He's really taken me under his wing and shown me a number of different ways that I can get involved."

They have included Anderson appointing Hunter to the local Progressive Conservatives Board of Directors as a youth advisor, actively involving Hunter in the campaign he recently ran and won, and pointing Hunter in the direction of other programs and opportunities where he can explore his love of politics, such as the Page Program.

Each year, 40 students are selected from high schools across Canada to go to Ottawa and work as Pages in the House of Commons, where they have the opportunity to learn about the House of Commons and the legislative process firsthand.

Those hired on as Pages work on a part-time basis during their first year of study at one of the universities in the National Capital Region.

For Hunter, his association with Anderson and the political process has broadened his horizons and his own sphere of influence to the point where he also now sits on a special committee

**“Participating in this project reminds us of the extraordinary spirit that lives in each of us. Together these five individuals demonstrate the capacity for greatness. Greatness that isn't defined by dollars and senses or by a label, but by a burning desire to better themselves and the world around them.”**



— George Tsougrianis, General Manager Southwest TV News

within the Chinook Board of Education, as their youth advisor.

Attending weekly meetings, the committee's focus is to come up with a plan for the future of education in southwest Saskatchewan. They will soon present that plan to the Saskatchewan government as recommendations. Hunter is proud to have been instrumental in developing that plan.

For both his work with the Swift Current PC Party, his work with the Outreach Program at his school, his involvement with his church youth group and his work with the Chinook School Board, Hunter was recently honoured with the Swift Current Chamber of Commerce's Youth Ambassador Award as part of their first-ever People's Awards Gala evening.

It was a win, says Hunter which left him both grateful and astounded.

"That was really incredible," says Hunter. "I get to go around the riding with our MP and work on a great campaign, and then I am asked to be a part of the future of the school system. To me it's just so cool to be a part of it all. It doesn't seem like it's that much of a service. I think anyone asked to be a part of it would do the same thing."

Statistics say otherwise.

With less than 28 per cent of youth aged 18 to 24 voting in the last election it seems there is an apathy amongst youthful voters that Hunter hopes he can help change, simply by leading through example.

"Politics is extremely important for youth. We're the next generation. If we keep going on with those statistics then you have less than 30 per cent of the population deciding how this country is going to run. It's your country, why wouldn't you vote? It just makes sense. It's why I tell kids, 'If you want your views and the things you want, represented in the house, go out there and vote. You don't have to get way into it and research it, but you have to know where you stand on the issues.'"

Driven to help turn youth apathy around Hunter says he has "definitely been talking to other kids to try and interest them in learning about the process. Giving them a base that they can make a decision about what they believe in."

That's something he feels is lacking in the current education system.

"I think it's true that a lot of kids are apathetic but I also think that a lot of kids just don't know how to really get involved ... and they're not really learning about it. If kids had the opportunity to learn and participate in it more, then you would see a larger number respond to it.

"I think society has kind of given up on teens," continues Hunter. "And it feels like they think kids need to go out there and learn things on their own, but I don't think that's true. I think you need to educate them and raise them with the values you want them to emulate. I also think you need to appeal to them with other alternatives and programs that they could take part in to steer clear of trouble.

"I have been really blessed with a great church, a great family and a great set of friends. Friday nights, my friends and I have a place to go, have fun and hang out. They keep me accountable and I keep them accountable. It's why I think I haven't been tempted to go out and get in trouble."

For youth like Hunter who are thinking of stepping up and getting involved in their community, he has these words of advice: "You just have to go out there and go for your goals. People respect you for that and for taking a stance for what you believe in."

Instead of the usually rebelliousness against social order and the ruling government, typically found in teenagers who are looking to find their own way, Hunter hopes to someday in the near future promote and uphold that social order and also hopes to one day be a part of that government process as a politician.

To watch the video presentation of this week's Fascinating Person tune into Southwest TV News Monday at 6:30 p.m. on SCN.