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Dave DeRaadt with UA Canada Local 853 is the best sprinkler fitter apprentice in North America thanks to his recent win at an international competition in Michigan.

Canadian wins United Association International Apprenticeship Competition

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staff writer

Dave DeRaadt is the only Canadian to ever win at the United Association International Apprenticeship Competition, which has been running since the 1940s.

"I'm pretty proud to bring it home for Canada," said DeRaadt shortly after returning from Ann Arbor, Mich.

Just qualifying for the international competition in Michigan was an accomplishment in of itself as DeRaadt, with UA Canada Local 853, had to be the best sprinkler fitter apprentice in his region and then defeat sprinkler fitters countrywide at the national competition this June.

While DeRaadt competed in sprinkler fitting, other apprentices performed in pipe fitting, welding, plumbing in HVAC servicing. There are six districts within the UA, with five throughout the United States and one district for all of Canada.

DeRaadt, who still has one more two-month block of school left before he writes his government test and becomes a journeyman, competed against sprinkler fitters who have more education. The competition had the apprentices write an intense test, interview and hands-on projects.

"He did a wet and a dry valve, trimmed it, hooked it all up, tested it and then set it off," described Kevin Middlestadt, DeRaadt's instructor at UA local 853 Trade Centre.

"I was told he was leaps and bounds above everybody else speed-wise and his stuff all functioned."

The competition was held at Washentaw Community College and competitors performed in a large circle while spectators watching from the centre, increasing the stress and pressure on the apprentices.

DeRaadt called the competition "grueling".

"It was a tough competition, they definitely made you use everything you've ever learned," he said, adding

that he studied for about eight months.

Middlestadt said he saw something in DeRaadt immediately, he is now a star student and helps others students in his class, and it's that work ethic that got him to the international competition.

"He took every book I gave him out of this school; he read them all over five times. He trained himself once he left school."

DeRaadt works for C&H Fire in Kitchener and owner/manager Mike Heller said there was training from him, training from the union, but a large part of it was DeRaadt.

"He put effort into it, he studied hard," he said. "In the U.S. a lot of the apprentices that are in this competition spend the whole year learning what they need to for this competition, we don't have that luxury. David won this on his own merit."

This competition was for bragging rights, but C&H Fire gave DeRaadt an all-expenses paid one-week trip to Hawaii and are paying his wages as well.

The UA instructors took courses during the competition, but apprentices were not allowed to attend any of the events, just to ensure that their instructors weren't helping them with the competition.

These types of competition are important for the apprentices' pride and to push themselves, said Middlestadt.

"Brother DeRaadt possesses natural ability but upon joining the United Association, committed to applying his efforts to excel in all skill sets necessary to becoming a competent journeyman. We are all very proud of Dave's accomplishments," said Greg Mitchell, Business Manager of U.A. Local 853.

DeRaadt said he is taking a lot away from this competition, like how to keep calm under pressure.

"I've learned a lot just by studying, so I've already furthered myself [more] than most just by reading [numerous] books about the trade and being as knowledgeable as possible about the trade."

He hopes that this will be a springboard for future Canadian accomplishments at the international competition.

"The UA Canadian Office is extremely pleased and proud of UA Local 853 sprinkler apprentice Dave DeRaadt. This is not only a testament to the hard work and dedication of Brother DeRaadt but also to the training and mentorship afforded to all union apprentices," said John Telford, Director of Canadian Affairs.

Other Canadians to compete were HVAC — Ryan Dowswell, Local 787 Toronto; pipefitter — Jeremy Brown, Local 46 Toronto; plumber — Justin Gordon, Local 170 Vancouver; welder — Brandon Lloyd, Local 527 Kitchener.



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