

MR RYLA

BRINGING MĀORI CULTURE TO THE WORLD

Eden Skipper was crowned Mr RYLA 2018 for his showcase of Māori culture.

EDEN has been mentored by both the Rotary clubs of Papanui and Riccarton, NZ, for the past three years. He took part in the Rotary Club of Papanui's University of Canterbury Rotary Associates program, which signs up students to assist with Rotary community projects.

The initiative was started post-Christchurch earthquake to tap into the Student Volunteer Army group that helped deal with the crisis. Students are required to contribute a certain number of hours to Rotary projects, which translate to points towards their Community Service degree.

Eden was recently sponsored to attend World Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA) in Washington, US, where he took part in many personal development activities, as well as showcasing New Zealand to delegates from around the world.

At the international hour to remember, Eden performed a two-minute New Zealand showcase with one of his peers, demonstrating a *hongi* (traditional greeting) and speaking a shortened *mihi* (ceremonial greeting), finishing with the Māori proverb, "Whāia te iti kahurangi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei" (Seek the treasure you value most dearly: if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain).

Eden also hosted a presentation – The Treaty of Waitangi and a very brief background of Māori – at the expo. This covered many facets of Ngāi Tahu as a

tribe, business and charity, including educational opportunities, the Whai Rawa (savings scheme), governance and environmental management.

He discussed New Zealand as a leading example of bi-culturism with indigenous people, and what can be learned from current practices.

Eden shared stories of Birdlings Flat, Wairewa, where his family have lived for generations. Catching tuna and eels on Lake Wairewa was a memorable part of his childhood.

"I recalled waiting behind the pā for what felt like hours in absolute silence, in pitch-black night. Then we snuck up to the drain and hooked tuna with our gaffs. A good night's harvest would exceed 200 tuna. They would be processed, smoked, then given to our extended family, with a few for us as well."

Unfortunately, this is now a rare privilege due to environmental issues, such as eutrophication, leading to a decline in eel and tuna stocks. New environmental management practices have now been instituted by the Ngāi Tahu to help preserve Wairewa's natural resources for the future.

"Indigenous practices in educational institutes is one of the core interest areas I focused on while at the conference," Eden said. "Of the candidates I asked, none of their respective home countries had indigenous practices integrated in their institute.

"For education, there is not a one size fits all for learning. Multiculturalism in



Eden Skipper: Mr RYLA 2018 with fellow RYLA participants at the Rotary Young Leaders Award North America. BELOW: Eden showcased New Zealand and Māori culture at the Expo.

education adds differing opinions and challenges others' thoughts, all of which helps develop a growing brain. It is also a show of respect, acknowledging the indigenous people of the land and the history it holds.

"I believe the University of Canterbury has the opportunity to be a world leader here."

On the final night, delegates were given the opportunity to perform in front of their peers to compete for Mr/Ms RYLA 2018 – the prize being free registration to next year's conference.

"For my act, I started with the proverb 'He aha te mea nui o te ao? He tangata! He tangata! He tangata!' (What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, it is people, it



is people) – a quote used previously by past Rotary International president Ian Riseley. I then spoke about the respect I had for everyone in the room. Each and every one of them were committed to making others’ lives better. After speaking my respect, I showed my respect by performing Tika Tonu haka.”

Eden was thrilled to be awarded Mr RYLA 2018 by the selection panel.

“I had delegates coming up to me afterwards giving me a hongi, shaking my hand and thanking me for showing them. The gratitude I was shown for my performance was incredible;

I couldn’t be prouder of how respectful and captured everyone was with our traditions.” •

