

Remarks on the Opening of Emily Carr Secondary School, May 6, 2004

I was delighted when I was asked by Mayor Michael Di Biase to represent the City of Vaughan at this ceremony---the *official* opening of Emily Carr Secondary School. The reason was that besides being the city councilor for this area, I have taught high school for about half of my working career. In fact I am currently on leave of absence from teaching history and law at Northern Secondary School, certainly one of the great secondary schools of Toronto. Now if I heard that last statement I would immediately ask myself two questions, as I am sure each of you have: What makes a secondary school great? Will Emily Carr be a great secondary school?

We have a beautiful building here, located between a very rugged portion of the Humber River valley and what will soon be one of the major libraries in the City of Vaughan. But none of those things---the building, the site, the neighbours---will make Emily Carr a great secondary school.

You have a staff made up, I am sure, of dedicated professionals who are drawn to teaching because of their passion for their respective fields, and who want very much to impart that passion to their students. But that's not what will make Emily Carr a great secondary school.

You have a wonderful mix of individuals drawn from all part of the globe, reflecting the rich multicultural mosaic that is Canada. But that's not what will make Emily Carr a great secondary school.

While all those things I've mentioned are distinct advantages, the greatness of Emily Carr Secondary School really only rests in one place---the commitment of each and every student to challenge him or herself to doing the best they possibly can, in the four years they have here.

Now, I know high school students well enough to know some of you are thinking, Where did they get this guy? What bull is he shoveling? This has all the makings of a bad valedictory speech.

But I do have a point, and the point is...Emily Carr---the person, not the school. If all the students at Emily Carr (the school) take Emily Carr (the person) as their model, this will be one great school. Imagine a school made up of students prepared to pursue those ideas about which they feel impassioned; imagine a school made up of students prepared to learn the traditions of their respective disciplines but also ready to challenge outmoded conventions; imagine a school where creativity, rather than conformity, is the very ethos of the place.

And that's my prayer for Emily Carr (the school) today, and for all the days ahead!