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YUKON, NORTH *of* ORDINARY

TOP 10 *under* 25

By Tara McCarthy

These young Yukoners you're about to meet are seizing opportunities, reaching new heights, and making their dreams a reality. *Yukon, North of Ordinary* is approaching its 10th anniversary, and we're celebrating by recognizing some of the territory's incredible youth. The public sent in their nominations and now, thanks to our panels of judges, the final list has been determined. Meet two of YNoO's Top 10 Under 25 in each issue leading up to our spring 2017 anniversary edition.

Judges: Kara Johancsik (BYTE), Chris Rider (BYTE), Gord Kurzynski (Youth Directorate, Government of Yukon), and Tara McCarthy (YNoO).



MORGAN WIENBERG
CHARITABLE WORK

Photo: Miriam Geer Photography

“I’ve always had this desire to make a difference in the world,” Morgan Wienberg explains. “In 2010, when the earthquake hit Haiti, I was moved to help, but felt like I wanted to do more than just fundraise. I felt I had more to offer than just sending money.”

Weeks after graduating as valedictorian from Whitehorse’s F.H. Collins Secondary School, Wienberg travelled to Haiti with few expectations other than to help. Now, nearly six years after that initial visit, she has made a difference in the lives of many through her organization Little Footprints, Big Steps.

The journey hasn’t been easy. Wienberg has been challenged in many ways, but once she developed a personal attachment to the children at a Haitian orphanage during that first visit, there was no turning back. It became the foundation for her life and passion.

“They were living in the worst conditions for any human being. Day-to-day you weren’t sure if some of the children would survive because they were so sick,” she says. “I really felt that all my personal plans—like university and anything else I’d planned on doing—those things could wait. I could do that later, but these kids really couldn’t wait. I didn’t feel like I could just come back to Canada and forget about them.”

Instead of attending post-secondary school, Wienberg took on three jobs once she returned to Whitehorse. The work was part of her new plan to raise funds and go back to Haiti as soon as possible. In February 2011, she returned on her 19th birthday with the objective of improving the living conditions for those children, but quickly realized their true need: to be reunited with their families. It was then that a Canadian paramedic named Sarah Wilson (who Wienberg had previously met in Haiti) reached out with the idea of co-founding a charity to help.

“When I thought about it, I really didn’t want to create another orphanage and perpetuate the problem,” Wienberg says of developing Little Footprints, Big Steps. “Trafficking, child slavery, abuse, and children on the streets—all of these things are happening when they are separated from their families, so my goal was to try and keep families together.”

During her five-and-a-half months living in the orphanage, she was able to reunite about 15 children with their parents. Wienberg recognized that building stronger families would build strong communities. However, some children didn’t have a supportive place to go. Out of that need came the idea for the organization to construct a transitional safe house in Les Cayes.

“It is a huge sense of security for a child, or just for a person, to know that whatever you do, whoever you are, this person loves you and you can always count on them. That’s not something all children have,” Wienberg says. “I went to Haiti as this 18-year-old and really

what guided me was that whole concept. What you need to do to get through to them is just love them and show them you accept them.”

As she describes her journey during a visit to Whitehorse this winter, Wienberg emphasizes how much her mother Karen’s unconditional love influenced her, along with the unwavering support of many Yukoners. Not only has the now 24-year-old impacted countless lives, she also has an extensive list of accomplishments.

Wienberg is the recipient of the Governor General of Canada’s Academic Achievement Award, Commissioner of Yukon’s Outstanding Youth Achievement Award, Paul Harris Fellowship Humanitarian Award from Rotary International, and the Queen’s Jubilee Medal in 2012. She was also a guest speaker at the United Nations Youth Assembly in 2013 and, most recently, was awarded the Governor General’s Meritorious Service Cross.

Wienberg’s devotion caught the interest of some Brooklyn-based filmmakers, who have been documenting her work for the film *Morgan’s Kids*. Set for release this year, it even includes her recent visit back home to the Yukon.

Regardless of the accolades and attention, Wienberg admits she’s constantly learning and has grown leaps and bounds from the self-proclaimed timid and insecure teenager she once was. In the past year, especially, she has recognized how to deal with the trauma and hurdles she’s been presented with and is on a path to embrace her life as something separate from Little Footprints, Big Steps, in hopes of ensuring the organization remains sustainable.

“I don’t want this just to be about what Morgan does in Haiti. I want it to be a movement and something that continues,” she says. “I feel like I’m most in my element and I’m most alive when I’m in Haiti, but also I see the huge potential and impact when I come to North America. I’m reminded of the support and able to do a lot for the development of the organization.”

Living in North America again seems foreign to Wienberg as she confidently ruminates on living in Haiti long-term. However, she also has opened herself up to consider advancing her education with an interest in studying child psychology, social work, and international relations.

She hasn’t set that in motion, but communicates without hesitation what practical lessons she has taken away from her experiences thus far: to be more open and aware of others, to have empathy, and to not underestimate how easy it is to make a difference.

“We think we need to be a doctor, or rich, or this or that in order to help, but it’s just about being open and seeing where you can intervene. Sometimes you won’t even know the impact you’ll have.”



SHARING THE LOVE

Support the efforts of Yukoner Morgan Wienberg by attending the gala fundraiser **Sharing the Love: A Little Footprints, Big Steps Event** on **Feb. 13**. Wienberg returns to Whitehorse for the event, which takes place at the **Yukon Convention Centre**.

For more about Little Footprints, Big Steps, go to littlefootprintsbigsteps.com.





BEN BARRETT-FORREST
BUSINESS/DESIGN

It's no surprise Ben Barrett-Forrest set his sights on an artistic career. Born and raised in Whitehorse, he began playing the violin at age 4, formed a swing band with friends at 13, got involved in local theatre around 16, and—as the cover pages on his school binders prove—was always into doodling.

“I did all this crazy custom typography that may or may not have been actually legible, but it looked pretty fun,” he says with a laugh over the phone from Toronto. “I have been really interested in graphic design and typography since a very young age.”

Now, at 23, Barrett-Forrest is the assistant art director for *The Globe and Mail*, tasked with coordinating the Life, Arts, Travel, Books, Film, and Weekend Arts sections for the national newspaper.

“It’s a very trusting role, with high responsibility and independence, which of course also makes it kind of stressful. It all falls on me to make these sections of the paper look good.”

He’s quick to use words like *grateful*, *honoured*, and *privileged* when describing the job and is genuinely modest when he mentions he’s the youngest person on staff.

“I still am slightly in disbelief that I have this position and anything that I design is going to be seen by over a million sets of eyes across Canada. It’s really humbling to have been given this opportunity so early on in my career.”

He credits his current success to his formative years in Whitehorse, a place where he could explore his talents and find his passion. Naturally, when it came time to seek post-secondary education, Barrett-Forrest went the arts route, enrolling at Hamilton’s McMaster University for a degree in arts, science, and multimedia.

Then, in 2013, a university project thrust him into the spotlight. His video *The History of Typography*, developed for an advanced animation course, has over one million views on YouTube. Using 291 paper letters and 2,454 photographs, Barrett-Forrest created a concise, stop-motion retrospective on how we’ve come to know and use various typefaces.

“It got a lot of positive feedback and gained quite a bit of traction in the design world. It was shared by all of my favourite design blogs and websites,” he says. “Creating that and having it be accepted by the design world made me realize people want to learn about graphic design.”

The project’s success also sparked a question: how could he make design knowledge digestible and approachable? The answer came via a game, specifically *The Design Deck*.

For his final university project, Barrett-Forrest created a 52-card deck, with each card relating essential information about graphic-design practices. His grandmother chipped in a loan of \$1,000 to support distribution, and Barrett-Forrest set a Kickstarter crowd-

funding goal of \$600. By the time the month-long campaign was through he had raised just over \$27,000 and sold 1,000 decks.

It, too, caught the interest of a wealth of design blogs and websites like DesignTaxi and Fast Company, publications like *The Atlantic*, and even British radio station Monocle.

“These projects have almost prematurely made me into an expert in the field,” he says. “I’m 23. I’m not an expert in typography or design. I still have so much to learn. It’s flattering, but also it’s a bit nerve-wracking.”

Amidst the success of these projects, Barrett-Forrest was also building a strong resumé. In 2012, he started Forrest Media as a channel for his freelance work and then returned to Whitehorse, in 2013, to work as a summer student at Aasman Brand Communications.

“It was incredibly challenging, but also tremendously fun and a definite learning experience to be given hard deadlines and specific client demands,” he explains. “I was worried it would be a creativity killer, but in many ways it was the opposite. If you know what needs to be created, if you have these limits, it allows you to think super creatively about the best possible solution. I found it elevated my work.”

In his final year at McMaster, a friend told Barrett-Forrest about a summer design contract at *The Globe and Mail* only 24-hours before the application

deadline. He feverishly put together a scrolling document that introduced who he is professionally and personally through original design work. After a lengthy interview process, he was awarded the position.

Following his summer stint at the national newspaper, Barrett-Forrest left Canada to work a dual design internship with the International Institute of Sustainable Development and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance in Geneva, Switzerland. And while he admits the cheese and chocolate had him sold on the spectacular country, he jumped at the opportunity when *The Globe and Mail* asked him to come back as assistant art director.

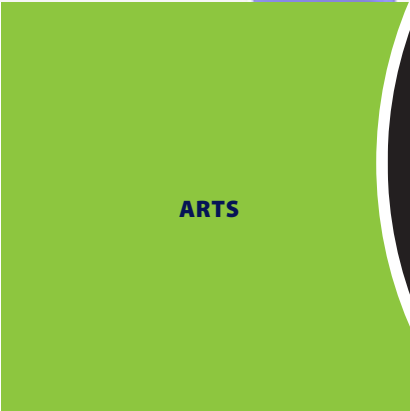
A sense of excitement is audible in Barrett-Forrest’s voice as he speaks of what’s next. He has a vision of developing a grand suite of design education tools and perhaps a mobile app someday. A typography-focused follow-up to *The Design Deck* is already in the works, with hopes of releasing it this spring. And while what the future holds is unknown, Barrett-Forrest is certain his supportive past will always be his foundation and something other Yukon youth should embrace.

“There were a huge number of opportunities I was given that people in other provinces and territories may not have had,” he says. “It’s easy to see the opportunity in Toronto and Vancouver and think that the Yukon is lacking, but I would argue the opposite. Just soak it in.” **Y**





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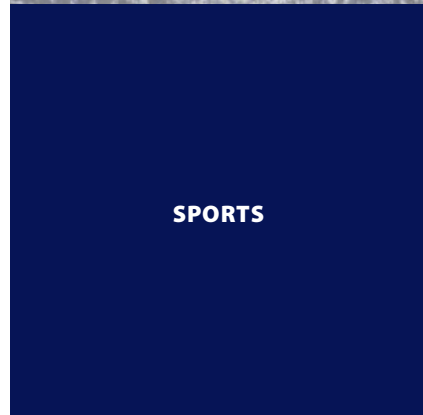
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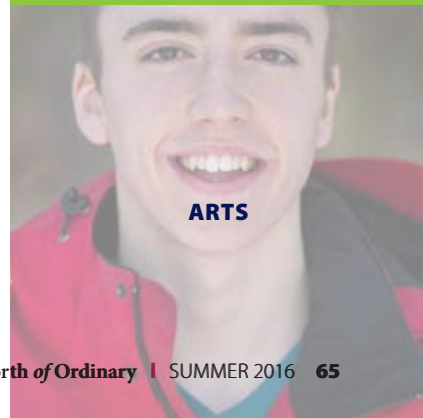
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RACHEL PETTITT
SPORTS

Photos: Skate Canada/Stephan Potopnyk

Rachel Pettitt skates onto the ice seconds before the music starts. With audience members and judges watching, a wave of nerves washes over her in that initial moment of silence.

"I'm usually pretty nervous, but I have a lot of excitement. I'm always excited to show my programs and show what I can do," she says. "I just try to skate for myself. I try not to worry about the results or where I'm going to end up."

She may not worry about the accolades, but she's certainly earned them. In January 2015, Pettitt became the first Yukon-born athlete to win a national figure-skating title, taking home the gold medal in the novice women's category at the National Skating Championships.

On the ice with a pair of figure skates is where the 17-year-old feels at home; heading to local indoor and outdoor rinks was a regular occurrence and a family affair. Her mother, Trish, is a figure-skating coach, her father, Kerry, is a hockey coach, and her three older brothers were no strangers to the ice, either.

"My brothers were always playing hockey so I was at the rink watching, and then I got started into CanSkate [a learn-to-skate program]," Pettitt explains. "I was probably on the ice ever since I could walk."

It didn't take long for her to realize figure skating was something she wanted to take seriously. By around 7 years old, Pettitt had developed a love for competing as a way to demonstrate her growing skill set.

"I love the freedom and expressing myself through skating and movement. It's like dance on ice—with jumps, of course," Pettitt explains. "I think when I was younger I didn't have as much fear, but definitely as I've gotten older I have more fear learning new jumps, but it's about getting over that."

Pettitt started competing in the Yukon Championships and has since moved on to the Arctic Winter Games, Canada Winter Games, and Skate Canada Challenge and will skate at the 2016 Super Series Victoria Day competition, in Surrey, B.C., in May. She also participates in the Summer Skate in Burnaby, B.C., each year, and travels to the U.S. for competitions. Beyond that, Pettitt was invited to attend the national training camp in Toronto, in April.

"I learn so much there. When I first went last year, there were amazing coaches, and you go in groups to work with each coach on the ice to learn different jumps," she says. "It's great to watch all the other skaters, too."

Pettitt's success has led to lifestyle changes. By age 11, she moved to Kelowna, B.C., to broaden her training opportunities.



"That was hard for me in grade 8, but I knew it was what I needed to do. I never wanted to move away from the Yukon," Pettitt says. "I definitely enjoy it, but it's hard sometimes. I know for my life as an elite athlete I have to give up some things, and I'm happy to do it. I'm really proud of where I've come so far, and I can't wait to see where I continue to go."

Being an elite athlete isn't like ordinary teenage life. Each year is packed with training, practicing, and competing. Pettitt dedicates six days a week to on-ice and off-ice activities, from learning new choreography to working out and attempting new jumps. However, it all pays off in unforgettable moments, like the 2015 Canada Winter Games, in Prince George, B.C., where she took home a gold medal.

"It was definitely my favourite competition of all-time. I remember I was pretty nervous going out for my long program because I was sitting in third or second place," she recalls. "I just took a deep breath and looked out to the audience and there were so many fans from the Yukon. So I said to myself, 'Just skate this for you.' It was so fun."

After such a monumental 2015, Pettitt was named National/Territorial Female Athlete of the Year at the Sport Yukon Awards, in February, and received an Award of Excellence in figure skating from the Government of Yukon.

She doesn't hesitate to thank the Yukon for all the support over the years and says her loving family has helped her every step of the way. Pettitt's mother coached her during her years in Whitehorse and continues to contribute to her burgeoning career since relocating to Kelowna.

"Sometimes it's hard because it's your mom, and obviously it must be hard for her, too, but I'm really appreciative that I have that and had it growing up," Pettitt says. "I think she shaped me into the skater that I am today."

Pettitt now competes at the junior level and placed sixth overall at the National Skating Championships this past January. She admits her career so far has been surreal, and while she may start her routine with nerves, she normally finishes with an unwavering smile and sense of accomplishment.

"I've always had dreams of this, but when I won nationals novice, honestly, I was crying. It was one of my dreams, and I never thought it would come true," she says. "Now I have dreams of the Olympics. And if I keep working, I know I can get to where I want to be."



KEVIN MCLACHLAN

ARTS

Photos: Brayden Swire

From busking to working toward a bachelor's degree in performance, the desire to entertain has continuously been at the forefront of Kevin McLachlan's life. Initially, it began in his teens, when he'd throw down a hat at the Atlin Arts and Music Festival in hopes of making a few bucks.

"I'd imitate Michael Jackson and people seemed to be pretty entertained by that," McLachlan says. "I guess my mom took that as an indication that dancing would be something I would like to try."

Dance and theatre have since developed into career goals for McLachlan. The 20-year-old is halfway through Sheridan College's four-year music-theatre-performance program. The college in Oakville, Ont., is known as one of Canada's best musical theatre schools, with a rigorous audition process wherein only 45 students are selected out of hundreds of applicants.

"It's been an eye-opening experience on what it takes to be a performer and what the industry is like," McLachlan says of the program. "There is that balance of not believing it is school because we get to dance everyday and act and sing, but at the same time it's a lot of work."

McLachlan got serious about performing in the summer of 2009, when he enrolled in a hip-hop dance camp at Leaping Feats Creative Danceworks, in Whitehorse. While new to formal training, he was placed in the intermediate level and bumped up to a higher division by the end of the first day.

"After those two weeks I had definitely fallen in love with breakdance. That fall I started classes three times a week at the studio," he explains. "The biggest thing about breaking is the level of creativity involved with it. I love that it is such an athletic dance; there's everything from standing to being on the floor, on your head, and in the air. I was pushed to think of new ways to do things or find a new, creative take on a move."

Born and raised in Whitehorse, McLachlan grew up exploring a number of artistic options, but executing his talents in that formal setting at Leaping Feats opened him up to a new sense of energy and encouragement.

"I am always pretty comfortable being out in the open and just trying things," he says. "Once you get started, it's hard to stop. When you can entertain and people are having fun, that's a great feeling."

From there, McLachlan joined the Music Arts and Drama (MAD) experiential learning program offered through Wood Street School, in Whitehorse. Within the program, he participated in variety shows and year-end productions throughout grades 10 to 12.

"I thought to myself 'Does this really count as school? Is this something I could do more often?' I think each year really helped confirm it more and more," he says. "There wasn't a specific moment when I knew I wanted to do musical theatre, I just knew I loved performing."

Beyond the classroom and the dance studio, McLachlan performed with Greenland's cultural contingent at the 2007 Arctic Winter Games, held in Whitehorse. He also represented the Yukon at Ottawa's Winterlude festival, in 2012, and at the 2014 Arctic Winter Games in Fairbanks, Alaska. Plus, McLachlan is a former cast member of the *Frantic Follies* vaudeville revue presented each summer at the Westmark Whitehorse.

"It's really hit me how much artistic support there is in Whitehorse. There were always side projects or a coffee house or some-

thing within the MAD program or at the dance studio," McLachlan says of his northern upbringing. "The Yukon is such a blessing, and it is still maintaining and growing that artistic community that is so awesome to be a part of."

He definitely misses the mountains, but so far the southern exposure has done McLachlan well. At the end of his first year at Sheridan he was awarded Highest Achievement in Acting Performance and received a \$1,000 scholarship. McLachlan was also one of 12 performers selected from across Canada for the Confederation Centre Young Company as part of the 2015 Charlottetown Festival, in P.E.I., and will perform with the company again this summer.

One way he keeps his connection to the Yukon strong and his love of breakdancing alive is as a member of the Groundwork Sessions Crew.

"They are the Yukon's one and only breakdance crew, and these guys started as my teachers. It's been so awesome to go from being a student to teaching alongside them, and now to dancing, training, performing, and battling with them," McLachlan explains. "Everyone [on the crew] represents the idea of the Yukon so well. We've got a tight-knit group, and all of us just have so much fun."

Groundwork Sessions have battled across Ontario, most recently at Toronto's Bazaar Dance Showcase in February. Next, McLachlan and two members of the crew will perform on June 18 at Whitehorse Nuit Blanche, an all-night arts festival held throughout the city.

The Yukon is both a supportive place and artistic platform for McLachlan, and he frequently ruminates on eventually returning to teach dance and theatre. While back in Whitehorse this summer, he'll also star in the locally produced play *Dogtown: The Musical* as part of the Magnetic North Theatre Festival. (See page 24 for details.)

"It's so great to always be welcomed back to the community," he says. "And I feel really lucky to have such a supportive family. With the nature of the business, there are no guarantees. You can have incredibly talented people who are in a long stretch when they're not working. But there's hopefully almost always room for me somewhere."





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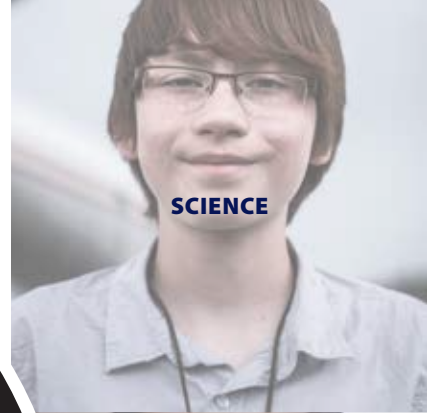
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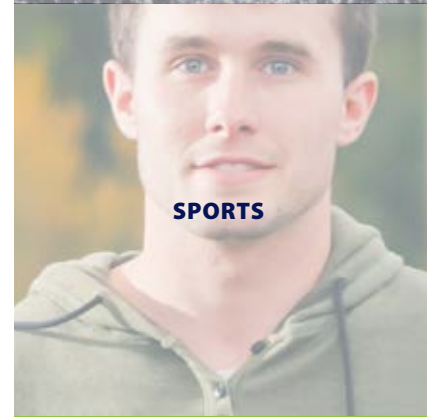
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SCIENCE



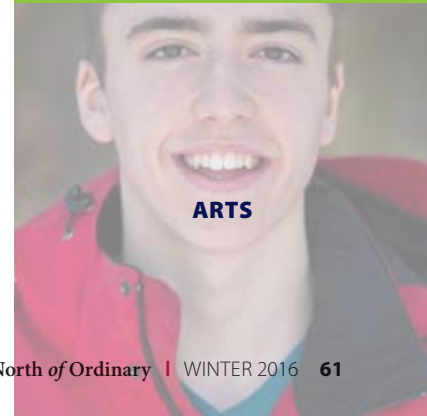
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ANNA JACOBSEN
SCIENCE

When asked what she examined for her university honours project, Anna Jacobsen confidently says, “terrestrial island biogeography theory.” A smile spreads across her face, as she’s elated at the chance to explain further. It’s immediately obvious Jacobsen adores learning and sharing her knowledge with others.

The 23-year-old graduated with a bachelor of science degree in zoology from the University of Calgary, in 2015. The project was her final year focus and examined the effects of patch isolation, area, and perimeter on the diversity of insect communities in remnant Yukon forests.

Growing up just outside Whitehorse, on the Takhini Hot Springs Road, Jacobsen spent her childhood wandering around the outdoors, hiking, camping, and hunting. She says her mother claims she was always curious about things like bugs and plants, constantly picking them up and examining them at a young age.

“I think the combination of being able to do something I love, which is being outside and being active, combined with science really helped,” Jacobsen says about her degree choice. “I like to look at the detail of things, so that’s why I like bugs because they have so much detail, but they’re so small. You have to really concentrate on them, and I like that.”

She chose to delve into the Yukon’s entomology as an excuse to return home each summer from her studies in Calgary, so she scoured a 15-kilometre radius around her family home for her research collection. That collection includes roughly 15,000–17,000 bugs, plus hundreds of thousands more she hasn’t yet counted.

The project was challenging, but Jacobsen was lucky to secure two supervisors to aid her along the way, including John Swann, a biosciences technician at the university.

Swann ended up helping send parts of her insect collection to the University of British Columbia, Edmonton’s Northern Forestry Centre, Royal Saskatchewan Museum, Royal BC Museum, Sault Ste. Marie’s Great Lakes Forestry Centre, the Canadian National Collection, and the Smithsonian for further study and identification. Some of her bugs may also be sent to the Canadian Museum of Nature.

“Everyone is really interested in bugs from the North because no one has data on them. Even when I was sorting my bugs, John told me it was the furthest north some of the bugs had been recorded,” Jacobsen says. “I was pretty proud. I didn’t really do that much. I mean I did identify many of them on a basic level, so I guess they’re still my bugs. They’re sort of my babies.”

Academics have always been a strong suit for Jacobsen. She earned the highest-grade award each year while attending Porter Creek Secondary School, in Whitehorse. In her Grade 12 year, she was awarded the 2011 Governor General’s Academic Medal. She also made the faculty of science dean’s list three times during her university studies.



TERRESTRIAL ISLAND BIOGEOGRAPHY

The effects of patch isolation, area, and perimeter on the diversity of insect communities in remnant Yukon forests

Research conducted by Anna Jacobsen

TOTAL SPECIMENS IN PROJECT:

15,041

HEMPITERA

= 12 families

(1,090 specimens)

*known as “true bugs”

- cicadas, aphids, planthoppers, leafhoppers

COLEOPTERA

= 18 families

(384 specimens)

- beetles, weevils

DIPTERA

= 37 families

(11,885 specimens)

- flies, mosquitoes, gnats, midges

HYMENOPTERA

= 12 families

(1,682 specimens)

- ants, wasps, bees, sawflies, hornails

It was around Grade 9 that she first realized her deep interest in bugs, so her goal was to become an entomologist. However, over time Jacobsen has shifted her focus to humans, applying for medical schools this past fall.

“The human body is so intensely complicated and it does such a good job of keeping you alive that I just want to know how it does it,” she explains. “It’s just so fascinating—all the different systems and how they work together. There’s so much to learn.”

She doesn’t hesitate to enthusiastically rhyme off her dreams of becoming a general surgeon, with hopes of returning to the Yukon for her practice and building a nice, little house out of town somewhere. The territory is a good fit for the self-proclaimed introvert.

“I missed the peacefulness of [the Yukon] and the quiet, too. I really need to spend some time alone, and in Calgary I was never alone,” she says. “Being able to step outside, walk for five minutes, and be in the middle of a forest, that’s a big thing for me. I need to be around trees and mountains.”

Besides nurturing her growing love for science and the Yukon, Jacobsen spent her younger years playing piano and squash. She also competed in snowshoe biathlon, winning gold in the 5-km-distance junior female category at the 2010 Arctic Winter Games. Most recently, she went to Greenland for the 2016 Arctic Winter Games as an assistant coach for Team Yukon in the sport.

And that’s not all—Jacobsen spent the past few summers as an animal care assistant at the Yukon Wildlife Preserve. This summer, she also trained for the half-marathon in the Yukon River Trail Marathon and ran a 21-km leg in the Klondike Road Relay.

“[My family] always says I like to do so many things,” she says with a laugh. “It’s not that I can’t sit still, because I can, I just always have a project.”

It’s not surprising she’s not casually waiting around for acceptance letters from medical schools. In the meantime, Jacobsen plans to polish up her insect research and submit it to a variety of academic journals. Then in January she heads back to Calgary to start a two-year personal-fitness-trainer diploma program at Mount Royal University.

“For now that’s the next step because I’m getting pretty antsy. I want to go back to school, so that’s the plan,” she says, adding that the diploma will also give her a head start on her medical-school studies.

Jacobsen says she was never quite sure what she truly loved while in high school. However, the past few years spent exploring the many facets of science has provided her with some personal clarity.

“Try everything because that’s sort of what I did, and I found a few things that I really enjoy doing,” she explains. “That’s what motivated me—knowing there is something out there that is right for me; I just needed to find it.”



MAX MELVIN-MCNUTT
SPORTS

A competitive personality and lofty goals are what guided Max Melvin-McNutt to develop his snowboarding career—that and a dose of sibling admiration.

“I always did what my big brother would do, so he started snowboarding and naturally I followed,” the 22-year-old says. “Maybe not in the first year that I was snowboarding, but in the year after that I knew I wanted to be a pro.”

It’s an impressive statement considering Melvin-McNutt was only 8 years old during his second year with the sport.

“I love snowboarding and I knew I was pretty good at it at a young age, so I just believed in myself and really set that as a goal,” he explains. “Seeing a trick you can’t do seems crazy, so when you’ve learned that trick ... to do something that seems so impossible and difficult like a 360, especially when you’re a kid, it’s really rewarding.”

Raised in Atlin, B.C., Melvin-McNutt moved to Whitehorse when he was 7 and first hit the slopes at Mt. Sima. By age 11 he was competing, and by 15 he won a gold medal in half-pipe at the Arctic Winter Games, in 2010. He admits the win was surprising, considering he hadn’t trained on a half-pipe at all.

“Freestyle aspects are pretty similar. If you have a good foundation in jumps it’s going to translate into your half-pipe riding,” Melvin-McNutt says. “I just went off that in my first competition.”

Things really started to change after he attended a summer camp in Whistler led by Adam Higgins, coach of the B.C. Freestyle Snowboard Team. Then Higgins saw him riding at the 2011 Canada Winter Games and asked him to join the team for the following season.

“It was amazing. I could actually see the pieces coming together from my dream as a kid,” Melvin-McNutt says. “When you focus on something all the time and you’re always practicing, it’s like you just make it a reality. My snowboard career has been a realization of that for me. I’ve always wanted this, so I worked towards it and made it happen. Anything is possible.”

He moved to Whistler for Grade 12, and while the experience was definitely a high, it wasn’t always easy. In his first season, Melvin-McNutt broke his collarbone. He returned to the B.C. team the following year, quickly learned a handful of new tricks, and ended up winning a number of provincial competitions. Then, he broke his collarbone again, and in 2013 the B.C. team disbanded.

Melvin-McNutt spent that season riding solo and it led to yet another turning point in the Yukoner’s athletic career.

“I didn’t get injured, so I was able to do all the contests I wanted to and I did well at them. That’s when I got noticed to be on the National Development Group,” he says. “Being part of the Canadian



SNOWBOARD SUCCESS

GOLD

Half-pipe Juvenile Male
2010 Arctic Winter Games

BRONZE

Snowboardcross
Juvenile Male
2010 Arctic Winter Games

8TH PLACE

Half-pipe Male
2011 Canada Winter Games

1st PLACE

Slopestyle
2013 B.C. Snowboard
Provincial Series

5TH PLACE

Men’s Slopestyle
2014 Canadian
Freestyle Snowboard
Championships

3RD PLACE

Snowboard – Men
2014 Dew Tour AM Series

FORMER MEMBER

B.C. Freestyle
Snowboard Team
Canadian National
Development Group
(Slopestyle)



team was another big step. And I was riding with guys that were way better than me and all these professional snowboarders I’d looked up to, so that was really cool to be bumping shoulders with them.”

Coming from a small territory had its advantages and disadvantages for Melvin-McNutt. The Yukon doesn’t boast the illustrious hills found in many other parts of the world, but he never let that slow him down. And the unwavering support of his hometown crowd didn’t hurt either.

“I felt like I had a lot of work ethic behind me—that was my thing. I just worked as hard as I could for it, so maybe that was a bit of an edge for me,” he explains. “If you’re the only person doing this from the territory, people will know who you are. Everyone is supporting you and backing you, which is really amazing, but you don’t want to feel like you’re letting people down.”

Besides his snowboard career, Melvin-McNutt also made a name for himself locally as a skateboarder. This past July he placed third in the annual Canada Day Skate Competition, in Whitehorse. In the past he’s taken the top spot, winning best run in the open category in 2015.

Taking to the pavement was also spurred on by what his older brother did, and Melvin-McNutt says there was a period when he thought about the potential of going pro in the sport.

“Skateboarding may have veered ahead for a little while before Canada Games,” he says, “but then I just gained more opportunities with snowboarding, so it was easier to fall into that.”

Ultimately though, both sports will only be for pleasure in Melvin-McNutt’s future. After hurting his ankle snowboarding during practice before a qualifying round at the 2015 World Cup in Quebec, then suffering a concussion at a competition in Bulgaria, he sat last season out.

“Whenever you do something that keeps hurting you, your body tells your brain it’s bad,” he says. “You can’t have anything like that holding you back if you’re going to compete at that level. You need to be pushing it 110 percent.”

Melvin-McNutt made the difficult decision earlier this year to retire from snowboarding competitively. His subsequent move professionally is coaching with Snowboard Yukon this season, helping the next wave of territorial athletes. It seems the perfect fit for him as he articulates his growing love of the Yukon.

“Whitehorse feels like home,” he says. “Every year my appreciation for it grows, and as I get older I realize how awesome this place is.”

He’s also working toward his carpentry certificate and has new personal ambitions like travelling the world to snowboard and splitboard in the backcountry.

And even though retirement at 22 seems unusual, it hasn’t broken his spirit in the least. “I made that little kid proud, I think,” he says about his childhood goals. “I feel accomplished.” **Y**