

Cisco Networking Academy Grads Golden at Skills Canada Competition

At the 2002 Skills Canada competition in Vancouver, British Columbia, Networking Academy graduates, Michael Taekema and Travis Axworthy, each took home gold medals. Both attribute the training they received through the Cisco Networking Academy Program as key to their success.

"Before I took the Cisco Networking Academy program, I knew a bit about Windows 2000 but I had no idea how to work a router at all," says Travis Axworthy. "I knew the logic behind it but I had no idea how to make it work. Honing those skills really set me up to succeed at Canadian Skills."

The words "British Columbia" and "Prince Edward Island" never sounded as sweet to Michael Taekema and Travis Axworthy as when they heard their home provinces ring out to a room full of hushed competitors.

"I was the only one competing from British Columbia in my category, so when I heard them call out my province I knew right away that I'd won the top prize," says Taekema. "I got so excited that I didn't even hear them call my name."

Michael Taekema, of Chilliwack, B.C., and Travis Axworthy, of Oyster Bed, P.E.I. – both Cisco Networking Academy graduates – each took home gold medals in the IT/PC Network Support category of the recent Canadian Skills Competition in Vancouver. The eighth annual competition, open to high school and

university students across the country, tests skills in dozens of categories including carpentry, auto mechanics, culinary arts, hairstyling, women's apparel design and IT software. Cisco Systems Canada is a sponsor of the Canadian Skills competition.

Taekema, 18, won first prize in the secondary school level and received a Cisco Aironet 350 Series Wireless Kit. Axworthy, 20, won the top prize in the post-secondary level and will represent Canada in the World Skills Competition in Switzerland next year. Cisco also presented him with an all expenses paid trip to Networkers 2002 in San Diego, California. At the prestigious five-day event, Travis heard top Cisco executives, including CEO John Chambers, and other leading industry experts share their visionary strategies for the future of networking and the role networking professionals will play.

Both students made it to the national championship by first winning the provincial competition, and both attribute much of their success at Canadian Skills to their Cisco Networking Academy experience.

The Cisco Networking Academy Program teaches students basic and advanced networking skills and information technology fundamentals.

The Program has proven to be a tremendous success in Canada, and around the world. There are currently



more than 9,100 Academies in 140 countries, teaching in excess of 260,000 students worldwide. In Canada, there are now more than 340 high schools, colleges, technical institutes and universities offering the program from coast-to-coast.

Skills for the future

“Networking is a big part of the computer industry – I think that’s where you want to go,” says Axworthy. “Fixing desktops is fine, but you’re more versatile if you know networking.”

Despite their vast networking knowledge even at such a young age, both students admit they were somewhat nervous going into the national competition. The two-day event, held in May 2002, required students to clearly demonstrate their ability configuring and supporting a network. They had to troubleshoot, install software and drivers, configure a Cisco 2600 Series router, fabricate network cabling, set up Web pages, and conduct numerous other related tasks – no small feat, even for technicians twice their age.

“My Cisco Network Academy training really came in handy throughout the competition,” recalls Taekema. “Cisco teaches you everything from the foundation of networking to advanced networking skills. Throughout the competition it was so handy to know basic information like the OSI layers of networking and standardization of how things should be done. The whole experience has been a great stepping stone to a career in IT.”

While neither Axworthy nor Taekema expected to bring home the gold, both felt they were armed with the right tools to tackle anything that might arise during the competition.

Axworthy, who flew on an airplane for the first time to get to Canadian Skills, earned his Networking Academy stripes while taking a one-year Information Systems Technology diploma course at Holland College in Charlottetown, P.E.I. A two-year pre-ITS college course introduced him to hardware basics as well as the Novell and Microsoft operating systems, but the Networking Academy program delved into such much-needed skills as configuring routers. His coach was his Cisco Networking Academy teacher Rob Blanchard, a former World Skills judge.

“Before I took the Cisco Networking Academy program, I knew a bit about Windows 2000 but I had no idea about how to work a router at all,” says Axworthy, who’s now looking for a job in the IT field. “I knew the logic behind it but I had no idea how to make it work. Honing those skills really set me up to succeed at Canadian Skills.”

Taekema took his Networking Academy training while a Grade 12 student at Sardis Secondary School in Chilliwack, B.C. He spent two months preparing for the competition by conducting practice simulations, reviewing router commands, and playing with cable. Still, when he arrived in Vancouver he was taken aback.

“When I first showed up, I got the impression that I was out of my league,” says Taekema, who plans to continue his IT studies at University College of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, B.C. “But once the competition started and I got in there, everything flew by so easily. In fact, I finished two hours ahead of everyone else. Having the right training certainly helped.”

But John Murtha, head of Sardis Secondary’s Computer Technology program and Taekema’s Networking Academy instructor, says he’s not surprised at all that Taekema took home the gold. He calls Taekema “a very bright and eager young man” who was chosen by his peers to represent the school at the competition because he’s passionate about technology and is always ready to help out when students or staff have computer or networking problems.

Murtha has spent the past five years developing Sardis Secondary’s IT curriculum, which now includes a host of computer-related courses for students at all levels. Cisco’s Networking Academy Program, he says, started the ball rolling.

“If it weren’t for courses such as the Cisco Networking Academy Program, some students would be wandering out there with no sense of career at all,” says Murtha. “This gives them a place to feel confident, a place to shine, a place to really be brilliant.”

Murtha, a former physics teacher, says he has completely changed his teaching style thanks to Cisco’s e-learning model and the breadth of certifications offered through the Networking Academy program.

“Cisco opened my eyes to what we can do for these kids in the classroom,” he says. “I can train kids in a way I could never do by myself. If students are taught in a traditional way and then thrown into industry, they have to first learn the content and then figure out how to adapt to a work environment. The Cisco Networking Academy Program gives them the ability to live and thrive in the real world. It’s one more skill they can put on their resumes to help them get a little further ahead of the next person when they’re applying for jobs.”



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