

## WorldSkills Calgary 2009 seeks to create a new generation of trades people

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About 150,000 spectators gathered in Calgary's Stampede Park to watch the best in the world show off their skills.

However, the skill sets being demonstrated at WorldSkills Calgary 2009 weren't the traditional roping and riding the park hosted two months earlier.

The biannual competition assembled the best skills, trades and technology practitioners from around the globe to ply their trade Sept. 2-5.

A total of 845 competitors, ranging in age from 17 – 22, from six continents and 51 countries spent several days competing in 45 skills in the hopes of earning a gold medal, signifying they were the best in the world at what they do.

The 40th WorldSkills competition hosted a number of construction-related trades including carpentry, bricklaying, stonemasonry, welding, plumbing and heating, electrical installations, as well as tiling, plaster and drywall, metal roofing, industrial controls and construction metal works.

Although Canada fielded a team of 38 competitors, only six - or just more than 15 per cent – of the Canadian team were represented in the construction trades and skills.

Of those, none of the competitors earned gold, silver or bronze medals in their respective categories, and only two of the Canadian construction skills competitors earned medallions of excellence for their work – welding and electrical installations.



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Gold medalist Tobias Kupferschmidt of Switzerland plies his Stonemasonry skills on a piece of Portland limestone.

While the province of Alberta invested more than \$24 million to organize and stage the world-class competition, they also invested an additional \$1.7 million to transport 50,000 high school students to the event, to encourage interests in trades, skills and technology.

“By transporting Alberta youth to WorldSkills Calgary 2009, we’re giving our students and apprentices the opportunity to experience first-hand the skill, creativity and passion that are part of dynamic careers in the skilled trades and technologies,” said Minister of Advanced Education and Technology, Doug Horner.

“We’re hoping to inspire our youth to explore the trades.”

Although the vast majority of the students were from the Calgary area, another 15,000 were bussed or flown in from as far north as Grande Prairie and Fort Vermillion to attend the event. But, the money spent on transporting students wasn’t just so they could stand on the sidelines and watch young trades people work.

Each of the 45 skills areas had world experts assembled to perform the task of judging the competitor’s work, but also to be on hand to talk to students and visitors about their respective trade.

Additionally, a small theatre was set up at each of the competition areas for students and spectators wishing to learn about the trade from an expert in the field, who explained the competition in general as well as the profession in particular.

Alan O’Brian, a trades consultant with Alberta Apprenticeship and one of the trades theatre volunteers at WorldSkills Calgary 2009, explained that WorldSkills is a good introduction to the trades for students.

“It’s a very unique opportunity because a lot of times people are interested in looking at some of the trades or they’re not sure what’s involved in it,” O’Brian said, adding that many times the only way to really learn what’s involved in a trade is to actually begin working in the field.

“(Here) you can actually go watch a demonstration and see how it all works,” he said.



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Chan-Chang Kuo from Chinese Taipei applies a little mortar to his bricklaying project. The competitor was one of 20 international bricklayers vying for the gold.

The trades consultant explained that Canadian entry to the WorldSkills competition begins at the provincial level for students.

"When you actually go to that technical training, they select the top students out of all the classes throughout Alberta and they get about 30 of them together, and then they would compete in the Alberta Skills competition," O'Brian told an audience of about 15 high school students who had gathered to learn about the roofing trade, adding that the gold medallist is guaranteed a spot in the next level of competition, which will be a little tougher.

"Then they get to the National Skills competition and they are competing against people from every province – the best from every province – where there might be between 15 to 30 competitors for each area involved."

The trades consultant explained that the gold medal winners at national competitions are then guaranteed a spot in the biannual WorldSkills competition.

The next WorldSkills competition is set to take place in London, England in 2011.