

Student strikes gold at skills competition

By Peter Marval

An apprenticeship student in the residential construction program at Conestoga College captured a gold medal at Skills Canada national championships May 4.

Jim Matthews, apprenticing for an electrician's licence, vied against six post-secondary students in residential wiring and came out on top a winner.

Representatives from five provinces (Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Manitoba and Alberta) put their skills to the test at the site of this year's competition in Montreal. The event began May 3, with an opening ceremony. Competitions took place all day Saturday and concluded Sunday with an awards ceremony.

Skills Canada is an organization that promotes technological and leadership skills in students at the secondary and post-secondary level. The skills represented range from hair dressing and cosmetics to plumbing and auto body.

Matthews, who won a bronze medal at the Ontario Skills Canada championships, said that if someone is given the opportunity to go, they should.

"It's good exposure to other schools and competitors and how they do things," he said. "You apply what you've been taught in a pressure situation."

The work was judged based on following spec sheets, code, safety, neatness and

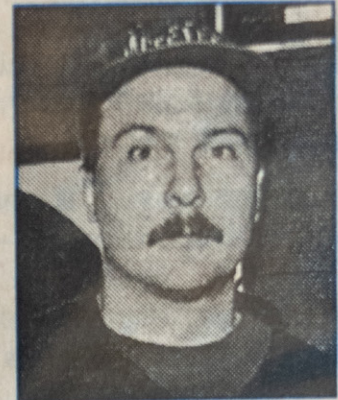
quality of workmanship. There was also a one-hour theory exam.

Matthews, 31, is working on his second trade licence, already possessing a licence in plumbing. He took time off from his job at Toman Services of

New Dundee to enrol at Conestoga. Although he said he is currently more worried about completing the program, with the combination of both plumbing and electric experiences, he hasn't discounted the idea of opening his own business. "I wouldn't be surprised if I went on my own."

Matthews also said he could not enter the world championships because the age of entry is 22 or under. Three other students from Conestoga also competed at the national championships in Montreal. Chris Charman competed in and won a bronze medal in carpentry. Janice Gingrich competed in architectural computer aided drawing (CAD) and Russel McKinnon in mechanical CAD.

Conestoga students who competed in both the Ontario and Canadian Skills Canada championships were sponsored by Paragon Engineering of Kitchener.



Jim Matthews

(Photo by Peter Marval)