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Barrie student a Harvard man

Posted By NICKI CRUICKSHANK

Posted 3 days ago



Gary Gerbrandt will be a freshman at Harvard University in Boston this fall. Parents Rob Gerbrandt and Bonnie North are thrilled at their son's opportunity to study at the prestigious American school.

Gary Gerbrandt will be one lucky freshman this fall.

The 17-year-old Barrie resident is just five short months away from hitting the books at Massachusetts' prestigious Harvard University.

It's an opportunity the academically-driven teen never thought possible, after filling out the application on a whim.

"I was not at all expecting to get in. The odds were definitely stacked against me," said the Innisdale Secondary School student, donning a pair of Harvard shorts.

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"This year, there were 30,000 applicants. It was a record year for applications and I still got in. It's just amazing to me."

Harvard accepted 2,100 of that stack of more than 30,000 applications this year, and Gerbrandt is thanking his lucky stars he was among the chosen few.

School is of the utmost importance to Gerbrandt. That's why his acceptance is a thrill with which he is still coming to grips.

"School's my life. I don't have a crazy personal life and I'm just an average guy," he said. "It's so exciting that I have this opportunity. I've been telling myself I have only a few more months."

The applicant pool reflected an unprecedented level of excellence, with more than 3,000 hopefuls scoring a perfect 800 on their critical reading SAT and 4,100 with perfect scores in SAT math.

Gerbrandt's results were both around 750, which his father, Rob, was ecstatic about.

"I know he's a well-rounded kid and I thought he had a good chance at doing well with his SATs," Rob said. "But it was still a huge shock for us."



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Gerbrandt has his heart set on the political science field, and applied to five Canadian universities, along with Harvard. But he admits applying to the Ivy League school was done purely out of curiosity.

"I was researching universities online, and for fun, I looked up Harvard," he said. "I thought there was no chance I could get into the school for rich kids, but the programs and requirements were actually pretty reasonable."

"There are thousands of different courses you can take there and I didn't know where to start."

Acceptance letters to Harvard went out last week, and Gerbrandt was a ball of nerves the day his letter came.

"It seemed so overwhelming just getting to that point, and it was bad enough that the e-mail came on April Fool's Day," the teen said. "I was at Starbucks and I was checking my e-mail, and suddenly, there it was. I didn't know what to feel. I opened it and it said I was accepted to Harvard in the fall, and I had to control my reaction because I was out in public."

His parents, on the other hand, went ballistic while driving home from a shopping trip.

"Gary called to tell us and I just started screaming in the car," said his mom, Bonnie.

"The people in the car next to us were laughing at me, and we rolled down the window to explain our son got into Harvard."

What a great way to kick off the Easter weekend, North said.

"We had to take the entire weekend just to calm down after finding out," she said.

And with his acceptance letter come a few perks.

"The place has 73 libraries and they have something like 400 different clubs," Gerbrandt said. "And there's a ton of very generous financial aid incentives. They're giving me my first year of tuition free. As I said, very generous people."

"They're also flying him down in a couple weeks to tour the campus," North said.

Like any proud mother, Bonnie said she always knew her son had what it took to succeed.

"He's motivated, he keeps his nose clean and he's a smart, great kid," she said.

Gerbrandt also demonstrates natural leadership skills, filling Innisdale's student's council president position and starting up the school newspaper.

While Gerbrandt is itching to

start his first university semester, Bonnie, is visibly struggling with her only child leaving the nest.

"It's such a privilege and an honour for him, I know," she said, her eyes welling with tears. "But I cry every day when he's at school. I cry a lot and hate thinking of him leaving. I'm going to do a lot of that."

Gerbrandt has snagged an opportunity many area students wouldn't think was possible. He's determined to become a Harvard graduate, and to spread the word about international education to his peers.

"I know how important this is. I'm not going to mess this up for myself," he said. "And there are so many Ivy League level students out there who probably have no idea that these universities are accessible to them."

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