

BEN WU

COMMUNITY CHAMPION | LEADER
SOCCER ENTHUSIAST | VOLUNTEER

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS is a citizen recognition campaign. Citizens of Maple Ridge were encouraged to nominate their exceptional neighbours this past summer according to five categories: artists, athletes, volunteers, storytellers and barrier breakers. Ben is the second of the nominees to be featured.

Thank you, Ben, for sharing your story with Maple Ridge. Learn more at mapleridge.ca/2016.



family in China. I felt excited for the new journey but also reluctant to leave my motherland. I was nervous to start a life without my parents in an unfamiliar country.

The first month was the hardest. I had to learn to use the commuting system in Vancouver and I nearly got lost several times in the hustle and bustle of downtown. I only knew a few basic phrases in English in the beginning which made school challenging at times. I missed my hometown and family in China, but when I saw the beauty of BC it gave me the confidence to take on new challenges.

The advice I would give to others moving to a new place is to be fearless to ask for help. I think it's very important to step outside of your comfort zone and reach out to people. Asking for help is a strength, not a weakness.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE THING ABOUT MAPLE RIDGE?

My favourite thing about Maple Ridge is its rich heritage and history, especially in sports as I'm a huge sports fan. Though Maple Ridge has the feeling of a small town, it has raised some of the greatest athletes on the world's stage such as Larry Walker, Karina LeBlanc, and Greg Moore. There are so many inspiring stories and people here that prove that somebody from a small town can shine and make their mark on the world. These hometown heroes inspire me everyday to dream big, especially in my own sport endeavours!

TELL US ABOUT YOUR LOVE OF SOCCER AND WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU.

As cliché as it might sound, soccer is my life! Soccer is my dream, my zen time and my lifelong passion. When I saw the 2010 FIFA World Cup on TV, it was love at first sight! I was determined to become a professional soccer player and hoped to play on the world's stage one day.

The first soccer team I played on was at my school in Maple Ridge in Grade 8. I can still vividly remember getting substituted into the game for the first time on that rainy afternoon in Merkley Park with the senior boys' soccer team. That was my first time ever playing a structured soccer match. Today, I play with the West Coast Soccer Club here in Maple Ridge. Soccer transformed me from a shy, timid boy into a young man of character.

WHY YOU THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO VOLUNTEER AND BE INVOLVED WITH YOUR COMMUNITY?

I learn something new each time I volunteer. It makes a difference in the lives of my neighbours and I feel it benefits my life as well.

When I initially started volunteering, it was a safe and supportive way for me to practice my English conversational skills with people who cared about me. I've also developed essential professional skills for life that will ultimately help me to get a job! Volunteering has really helped me cultivate a deeper love and appreciation for my community. Volunteering is always a rewarding experience. I currently volunteer as a member of the MP Dan Ruimy's Constituency Youth Council.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE COVENANT HOUSE SLEEP OUT.

Covenant House Sleep Out is a fundraising event where participants sleep outside for one night in solidarity with homeless youth. I was a participant in Grade 8 then, in Grade 11, I decided to take a leadership role as a sleep out veteran and member of Student Council. My goal was to bring the Sleep Out back to my school to inspire new students and raise critical funds for homeless youth.

The Sleep Out was a success! We were privileged to have the mayors speak at our event. Half of the high school participated and students raised over \$2,500. We woke up the next morning exhausted yet inspired and changed. We gained empathy as a community towards homeless youth while positively contributing to their cause and acknowledging our fortunate lives.

I discovered a lot about my own leadership style through the challenges I've encountered during the planning process. I learned that leadership is not about age, position, or title but instead it's about action, example and influence. I'm currently planning the next Sleep Out event which will happen in April, 2019.

“VOLUNTEERING HAS REALLY HELPED ME CULTIVATE A DEEPER LOVE AND APPRECIATION FOR MY COMMUNITY.”

GET INVOLVED

PITT MEADOWS-MAPLE RIDGE CONSTITUENCY
YOUTH COUNCIL:
druimy.liberal.ca/page/cyc

COVENANT HOUSE:
covenanthousebc.org

WEST COAST SOCCER CLUB:
westcoastfc.ca

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER YOUTH WHO ARE GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL AND LEARNING HOW TO BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT?

My advice for other high school students and graduates is to actively engage in their community and to maximize the resources around them. Fellow youth, just get out there and experience life in your community and find your passion! I believe that life is meant to be lived and that dreams are meant to be chased. Our youth is limited and will never repeat itself, so write a life story that you will be proud to share!



WHAT DOES "COMMUNITY" MEAN TO YOU?

Community to me is a place or group of people that you can call home. It is a family that welcomes you and involves you. It is a place where people come together and give support, helping each other thrive.

I also believe that you can make a positive impact in your community no matter your age; you must take the initiative and be willing to share your successes and failures with one another. You must learn about the differences of those in your community and dedicate yourselves to equality, diversity and inclusion.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED IN MAPLE RIDGE?

I have been living in Maple Ridge for two and a half years now. I love the people, the nature, the history, the culture and the community here.

CAN YOU TELL US A BIT MORE ABOUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO MOVE TO A NEW COUNTRY?

In the summer of 2012 when I was 12 years old, I flew to Canada by myself for the first time. My heart was filled with a mixture of emotions while I waited in the airport with my