

Jeff Atkinson Memorial Scholarship

Background

Jeff was raised on a third generation family farm on River Line just outside of Thamesville alongside his two younger siblings, Jennifer and Jared. From the beginning Jeff was a diligent worker and loving son to Dennis and Cheryl. He preferred building and playing with motors over sports and computer games. By the age of 10, Jeff and his Dad had built a small shed he had been saving money for on the family's property and finished a "go-cart" complete with front hydraulic 4-way blade, 3 speed manual transmission, AM/FM radio, lights and implement hitch that he used to scrape and manicure the laneways on the family farm. He spent many hours working around the farm with his "go cart", which may have been the ignitor that sparked his love for the land and farming. His father Dennis had an electrical business and Jeff could often be found working with his Dad at various jobsites as his helper on Saturdays and whenever he had spare time up until age 14. At that point, he began working as a summer student at Parks Blueberries driving tractor and bringing visitors to the U pick fields. The toys got bigger as he grew and throughout his teenage years he restored a 1949 John Deere B tractor to mint condition. He was actively involved in 4H as a member throughout his teenage years and discovered a love of plowing after joining the 4H Plow Club when he was 18 years old. He would go on to lead the club for 18 years and served respectably on the Chatham-Kent Plowman's Association in various roles.

After graduating from RDHS he attended Fanshawe College and completed the Motive Power Diesel Technician program. Family and his friends were never far from his mind as he came home every weekend. Once he had finished his schooling at Fanshawe, he came home and accepted a position at Thompsons Ltd and later at Batory Industries where he gained hours and experience as a Millwright. He went on to complete the schooling aspect of his Millwright apprenticeship in the evenings at St. Clair College and obtained his diploma. He was a skilled metal fabricator and mechanic and used these skills to start his first business Riverline Welding and Machine, which he operated in addition to his full time work. Farming and Operating heavy equipment always intrigued Jeff and he was eventually offered a position as a heavy equipment operator with Henry Heyink Construction. Jeff was the travelling Dozer operator and could often be found putting the final touches on otherwise completed construction sites. You could always spot Jeff on a construction site as he was first and only guy to tint the windows of his machines, again pointing to his meticulous nature. He spent 7 years there before he made the courageous decision to embrace his entrepreneurial spirit again and start his additional business, J.D. Atkinson Excavating Inc. He worked hard and showed extreme dedication to launch his business with a very methodical and well planned out approach. His efforts paid off and he was able to build a shop and slowly purchase equipment that allowed him to operate and maintain his own company. He loved planning and executing the more challenging jobs and took on parking lots, greenhouse site developments and laser grading, storm water ponds and grain elevator foundations among many others. He loved working with the farming community and could often be found cleaning up fence rows, brush cutting and installing driveways.

In amongst working long hours and leading 4H, Jeff loved family and friends. He rarely missed a Sunday dinner with his family and treasured time with his Grams who gratefully entrusted the family farm to him in 2003. He developed strong bonds with many of the 4H youth who he helped along – for many he became more than a leader, he became a role-model and supportive friend. He often took members of his club to tractor pulls or trade shows to encourage them in their interests. Jeff was always available to listen and help. He assisted many close friends through difficult times in their lives – he was a steadfast, loyal support to

those who shared their lives with him. After his passing in 2016 many people came forward with stories of how Jeff helped them without expecting anything in return – he donated excavating services in the community, gave financial assistance to people in need, and even stopped to help bale hay when he spotted guys working from the roadside.

Jeff was a kind, genuine and reliable man – the type that old country songs describe. He loved country music and could sing and dance with the best of them! He fit more singing, work and love into his 40 years of life than many see in a lifetime. He passed away following an accident in March of 2016 cleaning up a fallen tree alongside his field, next to his Gram's treasured bush. Jeff's family and friends were forever changed that day because there is no replacing Jeff. This Scholarship is an effort to remember him, to carry his legacy forward throughout the years, and to help give someone else an opportunity to go after their future the way that Jeff pursued his.

Nomination/Application Guidelines

The Jeff Atkinson Memorial Scholarship will be awarded yearly at the Chatham-Kent Plowing Match Banquet in memory of Jeff Atkinson. This \$1,000 award will be awarded to a Chatham Kent student pursuing post-secondary education (university, college, trade school or apprenticeship) in the area of agriculture and/or heavy equipment. Students may nominate themselves or 4-H leaders/highschool teachers may nominate a deserving student that meets the criteria.

Award Criteria:

- Chatham-Kent secondary student pursuing post-secondary education whether university, college, trade school or an apprenticeship, in the area of agriculture and /or heavy equipment operation and maintenance
- 4-H member at any point during high-school
- Most exemplifies the characteristics of Jeff Atkinson
- Further consideration will be given for applicants with financial need
- A short 250 word essay is required.

How to apply: email Janet Campbell, Secretary/Treasurer of Chatham Kent 4-H Association at chathamkent4h@gmail.com by June 15 with your name and contact information and attach the documents indicated.

What should be in the application:

- A recommendation note or letter from a 4-H leader or highschool teacher
- A list of county and out-county 4-H events participated in during 4-H career
- A description of your volunteer work, sports, family life, employment and other interests/activities outside of 4-H
- Essay (250-350 words)
Discuss what makes you a good candidate for this award by describing some of the characteristics you have in common with Jeff and how the scholarship could help you achieve your goals.