

# Student who grew up on Salt Spring wins award for rural internet project

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Former Salt Spring resident Jacob Maxwell, second from left, with his Northern Alberta Institute of Technology team, Abdallah Farah, left, Natasha Bergstrom, Steven Sager and Spencer Tracy.

Times Colonist A student who grew up on Salt Spring Island says his Gulf Islands background played a role in winning an Alberta engineering technology prize for a project exploring affordable internet access for remote communities.

Jacob Maxwell, 31, was part of a team of Northern Alberta Institute of Technology students that won the Capstone Project of the Year Award from the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta.

"This means quite a bit to me, to the validation of my work, but more importantly, I'm excited for what it means for the project that we've put so much time and effort into," Maxwell said.

The students developed an affordable and environmentally friendly way to use new technology to deliver internet to offgrid and remote communities.

The team, which included Abdallah Farah, Natasha Bergstrom, Steven Sager and Spencer Tracy, used solar power to fuel a Starlink broadband internet system capable of providing internet access to remote areas at a fraction of the cost of establishing an electrical grid and internet infrastructure.

Maxwell, currently at Lethbridge College, estimates the cost of the concept system in remote areas with plenty of sun would be less than \$10,000.

Growing up on Salt Spring Island, Maxwell said he didn't have a computer in the house until he was in Grade 8. Even then, he said, that computer was attached to a dial-up modem, meaning online access was disrupted when the phone was in use.

He said he knows what it means not to have immediate access to the internet, and what a difference it can make.

"I know what kinds of doors that opens in terms of education and expanding someone's mindset to a global mindset," he said. Aside from economic and social benefits, it can also mean improved access to health care, Maxwell said.

Barry Cavanaugh, chief executive of the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta, said the association has been blown away by the work of the students and their focus on tackling problems through an environmental and global lens.

"I hear them talking about making a difference," he said, noting they seem less interested in how things could be commercialized than how they can solve problems. "It's remarkable the massive ingenuity that's available in the engineering technology profession." [aduffy@timescolonist.com](mailto:aduffy@timescolonist.com)