

Former McMurray resident named award finalist for indoor farming project

[Canadian Press - Broadcast News \(Print Edition\)](#) Sarah Williscraft

Yesterday • 3:43 PM

category

Spare News

A former Fort McMurray resident is hoping his automated indoor farming project will take root after it was named a finalist for a provincial engineering technology award.

Noah Neiman, an engineering technology professional who was born and raised in Fort McMurray, and Sebastian Potoniec of Sherwood Park are finalists for the Capstone Project of the Year Award, which is given by the Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET).

It recognizes engineering technology students who most effectively demonstrate a knowledge of their field and create something useful to people everywhere.

“We want people to know that it’s not too difficult to design a system like this—either for a home operation or a large commercial operation,” said Neiman. “It’s very scalable and very achievable to grow plants indoors.”

The project is an indoor farming system designed to help people grow fresh fruit and vegetables inside their own homes.

The prototype for the project is an automated farming system that contains flowing water and lighting.

On a control panel, the user enters the specific growing conditions required for what they have planted, and the system does the rest.

The build itself is a simple one costing less than \$100 in materials. Almost everything needed for the build was found in a hardware store.

The project is a proof-of-concept build, but demonstrates that the project supports a build at any size and is low maintenance.

“Depending on how interested you are and how involved you want your system to be, it can range in complexity,” he said. “But a simple system is very achievable for even a beginner.”

Neiman believes the project is more relevant with much of the country still in lockdown. The indoor farming system could alleviate stresses brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and localize food production.

“With it being grown locally and not having your fruits and vegetables imported, there is less handling from person-to-person,” said Neiman. “There is minimal involvement from the grower, so there is less chance of contamination of the product.”

Neiman hopes to apply his knowledge from this project and make an operating indoor farming system of his own in the future.

“With practice and experimentation, there’s certain things you learn,” he said. “You’ll make small changes, add new features and I think there is lots of room for small improvements that will help out in the whole process.”

Neiman and Potoneic make up one of the eight final projects being considered for the Capstone.

“This project emphasizes the use of technical and practical engineering (technology) for a social good,” said CEO for ASET Barry Cavanaugh. “I love the thought that went into this from these guys.”

Cavanaugh said getting to this point is considered a big deal in the field of engineering technology. The students’ high quality of work makes for an intensely competitive process.

“By the time you get down to being a finalist, you’re already a winner,” he said. “These projects represent the forward thinking and problem-solving attitude of technologists.”

-with files from Lindsay Morey

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