

To the Families of Ellis Heyer and Collin LaMore,

I first heard the story of Ellis and Collin three years ago at the end of the year potluck for the graduating class of 2015. As I sat there inspired by each of the leaders who had guided me through many of the OPP courses, it was incredible to hear the story of Ellis and Collin knowing that they had inspired those who had come before me. When the award was given, I knew that I wanted to honor them and their love of the outdoors through inspiring others much as I had been inspired by them and everything they stood for.

The OPP gave me a sense of community that I have never felt anywhere else. A community of like minded, strong willed, and soft hearted people. There was something special about this welcoming community, as well as the inspiring leaders and instructors that made me want to learn more. Soon I found myself completely engrossed in the program and the community in which it thrives. I can honestly say it is this community that pushed me to grow in ways I never imagined possible, both as a leader and more importantly, as a person. Through the experiences I have shared outdoors with others in the program, I have created bonds that will withstand the test of time and harsh weather.

While I never knew Ellis and Collin personally, I can only imagine that they experienced similar bonds with the people they shared the outdoors with. Their memory is passed down through this incredible and seemingly everlasting community, and will continue to inspire the next generation of leaders to better themselves. Eventually, the memory of each of us will fade, as those before us have, but the lasting legacy of this program and the lives it has and will continue to touch is undeniable. Within this legacy, we will live even after we have passed, much like Ellis and Collin have continued to live in the hearts and minds of each member of this incredible community we know and love, the Outdoor Pursuits Program.

I am very honored to have received this award as each of the graduating leaders of 2017 embodied the criteria necessary to receive it. I am fortunate to have had such strong leaders and amazing people to experience this journey through the outdoors with. They pushed me to be better, lead better, and inspire others to do the same. I can't imagine traveling this journey with any other group of people.

Best regards,  
Michaela Pilkenton