



SEVEN OAKS SCHOOL OF THE SACRED HEART
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

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Taylor Allen, Team Player

From Maples grad to Winnipeg Free Press sports reporter, Allen's Seven Oaks roots remain strong.



Imagine it's 2011. You're a huge sports fan, and the big news is the Winnipeg Jets returning to Manitoba. You're right smack in the middle of the celebration and even get your photo on the front page of the Winnipeg Free Press the next day!

Exciting stuff... but not for Taylor Allen. Because being on the front page is what got him caught for skipping school!

As his Free Press bio details, it was his Grade 12 English teacher, Ms. Wilson, who delivered the blow, silently placing the front page of the *Free Press*' sports section on his desk. (Busted!)

Of course, that was then. Today, Taylor has a much different relationship with the Winnipeg Free Press: he's a full-time sportswriter. It's very much a culmination of his Maples Collegiate dreams.

The Write Stuff?

During his time at Maples, Taylor was an active athlete who played volleyball and basketball throughout his four years. At the same time, he remained focused on his desire to be a sportswriter.

"I used to read the Winnipeg Free Press every morning before hopping on the bus to go to middle school," recalls Taylor. "I was like an old man, reading the newspaper while I ate breakfast. It was what I wanted to do."

It was in Maples Collegiate that he really started to feel like he could turn that dream into a reality.

"I was really lucky to have some amazing teachers there, especially English teachers who gave me the confidence to pursue that career," says Taylor. "The legendary Ms. Wilson, Mr. Stark, Mr. Brown... you need people who believe in you and teach you to be creative."

He also credits his drama teacher for giving him the confidence to stand in front of a group and perform – an absolute necessity for an interviewer.



"I think quite often you're on camera, interviewing someone and you think I'm really glad I had someone like Miss Kurbis who did that and who was super-fun, who would push you to be better."

"I'm really thankful for my time at the Maples."

Pursuing a Profession in the Press

Even with all the support and guidance he was receiving from his teachers at Maples, there were still some people sowing seeds of doubt about his career dreams.

"There were people in my life who said, 'journalism is dying, there aren't that many jobs in journalism, you'd better have a backup plan' – and that was super-deflating."

It actually caused Taylor to change his post-grad plans. Instead of taking Creative Communications at Red River College, he opted for the University of Winnipeg where he took a bunch of intro courses, trying to find something that sparked a passion in him. But even after graduating with a joint degree and diploma in communications, he couldn't shake his Creative Communications calling.

"I went to Red River, and I knew I was at home. This is what I should be doing. It allowed me to be creative, to workshop different ideas."

Taylor got an opportunity to write sports in his first year at Red River College, with his stories appearing in the school's newsletter, 'The Projector.' As he developed his skills, he also got another opportunity: a sports internship at the Winnipeg Free Press for a university student.

"I had this portfolio of work, so I got in," recalls Taylor. "As the intern you usually cover the amateur sports beat, and I had a blast doing it."

After being told I couldn't have a career in sports writing, the door was slightly opened. And I worked really hard to try and make a strong impression so I could be at least considered if a job came open."

Sadly, even after his second year of internship, there were no jobs available. Taylor was forced to get a job elsewhere... until Free Press sports reporter Paul Wiecek retired. Taylor applied and has been with the Free Press ever since.

"I was very fortunate that they went with me. It's been a great ride."

No Plan? Don't Panic!

Looking back now, Taylor has some advice he wants to share with today's high school students.

"When you're in Grade 12, it seems that every second person you have a conversation with wants to know what you're going to do after high school."

"You're only 17 or 18, so you don't know. I thought I needed to have a plan – I was in a panic!"

"I remember being in high school, university, college, and you listen to speakers they bring in who tell you that you can do anything. And you can."

"You have talents and gifts - anything you want to make happen, you can make happen."

"I put the most energy into being a sports reporter, and I am. I volunteered, made connections, wrote for journals. Might take some time, but it can happen."

"My advice is to take a deep breath. You do have to apply yourself, but don't worry if it takes time."

The Doctor is In(Vested)

How Dr. Kevin Saunders Supports Education in Seven Oaks



Dr. Kevin Saunders would say he grew up 'as a North End Guy.'

He went to Robertson, Minarski, and Sisler back in the day. His children went to Ecole Riverbend School (now Riverbend Community School), Seven Oaks Middle School, and West Kildonan Collegiate. Even his career was spent in the North End, with a family practice at the Rivergrove Medical Clinic which he only left in 2023 – after 38 1/2 years of service.

Dr. Saunders is a past president of the medical staff at Seven Oaks General Hospital, a past chair of the Section of Family Practice of Doctors Manitoba, and a past president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba. He's contributed to medical research in diabetes, lipids, vascular disease, and weight management. He was involved in program development at The Wellness Institute.

Today, however, his support of the community comes in a different form; as part of the Platinum Jets. Yet even his connections with that charity go far back.

"I was an intramural hockey player," recalls Dr. Saunders. "My friends and I joined a team with girls who were blonde and called themselves the Platinum Jets. The name stuck!"

That team would later evolve into one of Winnipeg's most well-recognized fundraisers, supporting many charities involving children and health care. For 43 years, the lynchpin of the fund-raising efforts has been the annual Platinum Jets Golf Tournament.

"We currently raise \$125,000 on this one-day tournament for charity," explains Dr. Saunders. "One hundred and ninety attendees from all walks of Winnipeg life play at the Kildonan Golf Course - a place where most of us started golf."

The Seven Oaks community has certainly been a beneficiary of the Platinum Jets' generosity. When it comes to the Seven Oaks community specifically, the Platinum Jets contributed \$100,000 over five years to the Seven Oaks Performing Arts Centre on Jefferson Avenue and contribute an annual \$1,500 to each of the Seven Oaks high schools to assist deserving students in attending post-secondary education of their choice.

"We request that the scholarships don't go to the best student or athlete, but to a hardworking, deserving student who – without the assistance – may not be able to further their education," says Dr. Saunders.

"But all our projects are so great... improving lives in our community, in even a small way, keeps our board involved and dedicated after all these years."

Shining Examples

Among the projects the Platinum Jets have contributed to, there are several with close ties to the Seven Oaks community:

The Seven Oaks Performing Arts Centre – The SOPAC was created with the goal of providing the community a proper venue to share arts, education, or other performing opportunities. All schools in the divisions use the space, bringing the arts to children who would otherwise not have them.

The Chronic Disease Innovation Centre at the Seven Oaks General Hospital – To help build a research hub with the dream of attracting researchers, the Platinum Jets donated \$100,000. Since 2017, the Centre has grown its team and, among its research projects is developing grant proposals to support research that could ultimately eliminate diabetes.

The Wellness Clinic – The Platinum Jets' support of a major upgrade at the Clinic brought in a larger staff of physiotherapists, chiropractors, massage therapists, dieticians, and mental health counsellors, occupational as well as other therapy services.

The Spirit Cottage at the St. Amant Centre – A unique project that created an accessible cottage where residents and their families can live together in the same space for special events or weekends. Since the cottage opened 10 years ago, there have been 1800 bookings, used in all seasons. A home away from home for those without accessible homes to share family time.

If you would like to support education with a donation to the Seven Oaks Education Foundation, or want to find out more about what SOEF does, visit www.7oaks.org/soef