

George Plant

Skill: Stonemasonry

From: Stoke-on-Trent
Competed in: WorldSkills 2007, Japan
Employer: Ian Knapper Stonemasonry

Qualifications

- 10 GCSE's
- NVQ Level 3 in Stonemasonry



Working for Ian Knapper Stone Masons, George knew that he was going to be getting involved in competitions, after all, both his boss and his work colleague are past competitors themselves. So it was almost inevitable that in 2007, twenty-one year old George headed to Japan to take part in WorldSkills in the Stonemasonry competition.

So what got George hooked on stonemasonry in the first place?

George says "When I was at school, I used to walk past Ian Knapper's and seeing them at work really intrigued me. I applied for a Saturday job there and began working full time when I finished school." George's love of stone and the work involved in carving and shaping it started from there. It was while he was at college, studying for his NVQ that he was able to enter competitions, something which his bosses actively encouraged. George set about competing at a regional and national level, which finally led him to a place on Team UK after a tough play off. "I was over the moon when I won my place on the team. I just couldn't believe it, it felt brilliant."

But how do you train for such an event?

Well, training is tough. Stonemasonry is a very strict discipline. "I carve fireplaces and staircases from solid stone, so measurements have to be very exact. You can't be out even by a couple of millimetres." George set about training hard, learning new techniques and improving his skills. He spent almost a year, with the help of his college and his employers, testing himself to the limit to make sure he was up to the standard he needed to be.

So what was WorldSkills like?

George was lucky to have the support of his proud mum and dad who accompanied him to WorldSkills. This was coupled with the support that the whole team got from each other – something that George cherishes. He knows that the team will stay friends for a long time to come.

"WorldSkills is an amazing event. It was brilliant to know that I was competing against the best in the World. It was nerve wracking, especially because you knew that you couldn't drop any marks against the others because they were so good. It was really tough but really enjoyable at the same time. Knowing that all the team was going through the same emotions certainly helped."

What about returning to the UK?

George says "Getting back to the UK was great. I got to spend time with my family and friends but I was sad to be leaving my team mates and my experiences behind. I know I'll never forget my time in Japan."

And does George feel that WorldSkills has changed anything for him? He certainly thinks so.

"I feel that a lot has changed for me because of WorldSkills. At work, clients and work colleagues are all interested in how it went and what it was like for me. It is like they have a new respect for me because of all the hard work I put into it and the fact that I made it to Japan to represent my country. I feel much more confident at work and I've got loads of new skills, experience and knowledge about stonemasonry which I can use at work - which is obviously a great help."

Does George have any words of wisdom for future competitors?

George firmly believes in the benefits of WorldSkills, knowing that it gives young people a chance to gain vocational skills, travel the world and take part in the very exciting competitions.

"Getting involved with WorldSkills and skill competitions in general is one of the best things you can do. But be warned, you can never train enough and you've always got to give it your all."

And what will George remember most about WorldSkills?

For George, the lasting memory will be from the final night of the competition, when everyone had downed tools for the last time.

"I remember looking around at my team mates who I'd spent so much time with and shared this amazing adventure with and realising what good relationships we'd built up and what we had achieved in Japan. It was sad to know it was over, but great to know that you are one of the best in the World"

And what about the future for George?

Well, George is very happy at Ian Knappers. He intends to keep on learning and improving his skills and perhaps eventually start up his own stonemasonry business in the years to come. He would love to be part of WorldSkills London 2011 and will certainly be paying the competition a visit when it comes to London – although this time as a spectator. His philosophy? "I just try to do my best in all that I do." And so far that is certainly working for George.

A word from his employer: Ian Knapper, owner, Ian Knapper Stonemasonry

Ian Knapper has been involved in competitions for over ten years. George is Ian's second WorldSkills competitor but he definitely won't be his last.

So why does Ian get involved in WorldSkills? For Ian it's simple.

"Having employees who are World class is brilliant. The skills they learn are there for them to use every day at work and it really helps to promote the business too which is very important."

But what about the training needed?

"There is obviously a lot of training required to prepare for something like WorldSkills. George needed to take a lot of time off work to do it and when he was at work we often were helping improve his skills further too. It means losing money in the short term but I've always known that it's worth it in the long run, so I don't mind giving him that time and support."

Would Ian recommend supporting WorldSkills to other companies?

The answer is a firm 'yes'. "There are lots of benefits that come out of supporting employees through competitions both for them personally and for you as a company. I would say though that you can never train enough for something like this, and giving your employee the chance to do this is fundamentally important."



For more information, please contact Kathryn Crookenden, Communications Manager PR, UK Skills
Kathryn.crookenden@ukskills.org.uk