

The Sault Star (Sault Ste. Marie, ON)		Order/Commande
		122359
Date 26.06.2006	Circ. 23500 Page A3	1 / 2

Picked for review group, he'll study voting system

AUC student's name drawn for electoral assembly

By Brian Kelly
THE SAULT STAR

David Viitala wasn't sure he was the right guy to have a say in deciding how Ontario MPPs will be elected in the future.

But Viitala's parents, Raimo Viitala and Ann Marie Sutherland, encouraged him to indicate he was interested in the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform.

Viitala's name was chosen Sunday in a random draw to represent the Sault Ste. Marie riding on the 103-member assembly.

"At first I was hesitant. I thought, 'Well, I don't really know too much about politics. I don't know what I can do,'" said Viitala.

"But my parents urged me. They thought it might be a good opportunity for me. I started thinking about it and I thought, 'This is a really interesting opportunity to take part in the election system.'"

During the Ontario election campaign in 2003, Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty promised to review electoral reform during his first mandate if elected.

Viitala and 102 assembly members from across the province start meeting in

September.

They will review Ontario's electoral system and learn about other ways politicians can be elected, such as proportional representation.

Public hearings begin in late November and run until February.

Viitala, a fourth-year psychology student at Algoma University College, plans to do his homework and read up about elections during his summer break.

"I'm definitely going to try to educate myself more on the system as it is right now so that I'm ready and that I can contribute to my best ability come September," he said.

Viitala, who said he has voted in both elections in which he was eligible to participate, hopes he can offer a youth perspective to the assembly.

"I'm definitely willing to do my best," said the 21-year-old.

Viitala's father is the honorary consul for the consulate of Finland in the Sault.

Donald Brickett, of McKerrrow, will represent Algoma-Manitoulin.

Viitala



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		122359
Date 26.06.2006	Circ. 23500 Page A3	2 / 2

All 25 people who were chosen at random from the Sault and Algoma-Manitoulin ridings went to Sunday's meeting at Holiday Inn.

Only one withdrew from the random draw due to personal reasons, said Kelly Burke, executive adviser and counsel to assembly chair George Thomson.



She said Ontario residents randomly chosen for possible service on the assembly are very enthusiastic about the group's mandate.

"They're absolutely excited about being involved in a historic process and contributing to our democracy," said Burke.

"This is giving them an opportunity to not only learn about our democracy but also to share their views and to consult with other Ontarians broadly to find out about what they're thinking about where we're headed for the future."

Area residents can soon send the assembly written submissions.

The group's website address is www.citizen-sassembly.gov.on.ca

The phone number is (866) 656-9908.