

Scholarship recipient strives to extend Bell's legacy

Sofia Napolitano

Sofia Napolitano considers herself a storyteller at heart, so to have an inspiring figure like Ellen Bell now woven into her personal history comes as a significant honour.

Napolitano was selected as the 2024 recipient of the Ellen Bell YMCA Memorial Scholarship, awarded annually to a female student pursuing a career in marketing or advertising.

"I want to be able to share the story of who Ellen was, and to mimic the values that she upheld and her family upholds: treating others well and supporting my community," said the 23-year-old.

Bell was a dedicated YMCA volunteer who valued giving back to her community and was highly respected in BC's advertising industry before her passing more than 30 years ago. Bell's friends and family, led by Shirley Broadfoot and Nick Voss, founded the scholarship to support other remarkable young women with similar aspirations.

Napolitano is a fifth-year business administration student at Simon Fraser University and a management consulting summer intern at KPMG, where she works with health agencies to examine how environmental conditions and climate change impact personal wellness. She has previously held roles in logistics with Adidas in Germany, Deloitte in Toronto and the Vancouver Airport Authority. Those experiences aren't that of a traditional marketer, but Napolitano said marketing strategies are "consistently" part of her daily work.

"I think sometimes when people think of marketing, they think of promotion and pricing, but one that they always kind of miss is the persuasion part of it," she said. "It's the skill of how you persuade people and how you share a story that makes marketing great."

Having spent two years on the SFU debate team, Napolitano is well-versed in the art of persuasion. Also an accomplished water polo player, many of her formative experiences came in team settings, so she's proud to have given back as a coach for youth soccer in the past, and now for the SFU JDC West debate team. Her previous volunteerism includes working with the Hastings Sunrise Community Police Centre as a citizen patroller. She credits her extracurricular activities and community with instilling her values of giving back.

"I really tried to embody that in my everyday life and things that I do," she said. "I think it's just important to give back to the community that has given me so much."

Napolitano was officially presented with the scholarship during the 40th annual Heritage Club Luncheon, which Voss also attended alongside Bell's nieces and scholarship selection committee members Wendy Allen and Jennifer Foreman.

"I'm inspired that they saw something in me that reminded them of Ellen," said Napolitano. "I hope that I can use these financial means to follow along her journey, explore and live up to her core values."