Yurii Svitak is the best of the best. The 26-year-old Canuck who hails from Greater Toronto challenged 13 other skilled contestants from across Canada at the 2003 National Carpentry Drywall Apprenticeship Contest in Prince Edward Island and walked away with the top trophy.

Svitak’s award, which included a check for $500 and a DeWalt cordless screw gun, is a feather in the cap of the Interior Systems Contractors Association of Ontario because the young drywall applicator’s apprenticeship included education at ISCA’s training center before he received his journeyman’s ticket (interior systems applicator) earlier this year. The last time someone from ISCA won top honors at the national contest was in 1999.

The contest included a three-hour written exam (he finished in two hours) and an eight-hour practical exam in which contestants were required to build an 8-foot by 8-foot wood frame module from a set of drawings. The module required a front door, rough opening for a window, and the application of ceiling tiles. Svitak completed the work in less than eight hours to beat out the second place contestant, from Hamilton, Ont., by at least a full hour.

Sponsored by Carpenters District Council, which is affiliated with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters &Joiners of America, the contest was held in late August in Canada’s smallest province at Charlottetown’s Confederation Park. The park marks the site of the historic landing in 1864 of the Fathers of Confederation, who set in motion the birth of Canada in 1867.

Svitak credits his success at the contest in part to a “very good teacher,” Jarek Rams, who works with him at drywall firm DiSal Contracting Ltd, of Aurora, which is north of Toronto.

He also thanks instructors at ISCA where he learned much about the trade. “I didn’t want to go to school but I’m grateful for the guys who made me go. I think anyone going into the trade should take advantage of ISCA’s school,” Svitak says.

At the association’s training center he finished tops in the advanced class, which was why he was a representative at the provincial apprenticeship contest held in Hamilton in June. Chalking up first place there, he was one of the odds-on favorites going into the national apprenticeship contest.

Candi Colandrea, assistant training coordinator of ISCA, says Svitak’s top credentials come with praise from people he has worked with: “After hearing from employers, we found that he has always been recognized by his peers and his employers as a leader both in the practical application and the theory end of the trade.”

Born in the Ukraine, the new Canadian moved to New York City when he was 15 before heading north to Toronto seven years later. “I took up the trade because I saw construction as the best way of making money outside of going to university,” he says. In New York, he started as a laborer and moved up the ladder to do some carpentry and cabinetmaking before landing in Toronto in 1999 where he signed on as a drywall apprentice.

Aside from having good instruction and a natural bent for the field, Svitak’s success comes from having an open mind to new ideas. “I think a lot of guys with 20 years of experience don’t want to learn from young guys like me,” he says, “but I think you can even learn from just about anybody—even from a two—day apprentice if you listen carefully enough.”

A foreman at DiSal Contracting, Svitak hopes to one day go on to other things—possibly a career in drywall estimating or even in interior design. “I’ve lots of plans,” he says. “I just don’t know if I’ll be able to do all of them.”

About the Author
Don Procter is a free-lance writer in Ontario, Canada.