

MARTEN AND ALEX LING CLASS OF 2022

BRINGING JOY AND LAUGHTER THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE



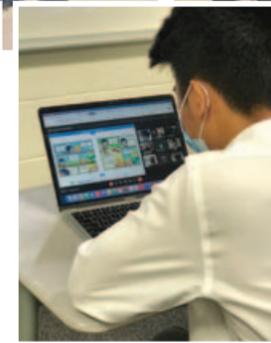
BY LAUREN ALPERN

It can be difficult to tell Alex and Marten Ling, Class of 2022, apart. While unique personality traits and hairstyles help people differentiate between the two, the Georgian brothers are definitely equally impressive. Captains in Grade 8, the two are now Prefects, with Marten holding the title of Communications Prefect, while Alex is the Junior School and Community Service Prefect.

Both boys have dedicated themselves to community service at Royal St. George's College, participating in the Right to Play program with Ms. Elizabeth Baltazar and her students in Grades 2 and 3 at Lord Dufferin Public School before COVID hit and then both the virtual Reading and Math Buddies programs during COVID.

Alex credits his experience with Right to Play and the kids at Lord Dufferin to the choices he made in his prefectship. And while his experience might have shaped his Grade 12 path, the reason why he enjoys his time with the kids is simple. It brings them joy, which brings him joy in return.

"I had a tough time enjoying myself at school sometimes when I was their age, so it's really important to me that—especially when they're that young—they're enjoying their time at school and enjoying life," said Alex. "If I can do anything to help create those opportunities, it's something I really enjoy doing. I'm hoping that if I'm putting smiles on their faces, I'm doing a fine job."



Alex and Marten have been dedicated to the kids at Lord Dufferin Public School, through both Right to Play and Virtual Reading Buddies. They even organized a book drive for them.

Marten also enjoys his time with the kids at Lord Dufferin and doesn't see it as community service work. Like Alex, he didn't have an easy time at school before arriving at RSGC and appreciates the value of having someone who can make a difference.

"It doesn't feel at all like we're volunteering. It's just something we enjoy doing. If we were just doing it for the service hours, we would have stopped a long time ago," said Marten. "We just love the kids there. It kind of feels like hanging out with friends. Every kid deserves to have someone who really cares about them, someone who tries to improve their attitude and their life at school. It doesn't have to be me or Alex, but if I can make one kid smile, that's worth it."

Alex also already has enough community service hours to graduate. For him, the continued involvement is about connection.

"It was actually never really about the hours. As cliché as that sounds, once I started connecting with those kids, it never felt like community service," said Alex. "I don't really see it as something I'm going out of my way to do. It's something I look forward to every week."

Alex and Marten have really embraced the Virtual Reading Buddies program, coming as regularly as they can and often choosing books that were

their favourites when they were growing up. Their memories of Reading Buddies when they were kids—having older students read to them—have inspired them to do the same.

"I remember how exciting it was when the older kids would come read to us," said Marten. "The books they read were so entertaining to me. I want that same feeling for the kids as well."

Because the twins understand the value of reading, they organized a book drive for Lord Dufferin during the 2020/21 school year. Alex and Marten collected about 15 boxes of books generously donated by the RSGC community and personally delivered them to Ms. Baltazar. They couldn't meet the kids in person, but they did receive thank you cards.

"We wanted to do something that would be special for them during the pandemic. We thought many of them might not have a lot to do during the day or have anything to entertain themselves," said Marten. "We wanted them to have the same opportunities, and we assumed they weren't getting the literature that they needed."

Ms. Baltazar, who has known the twins since they started with Right to Play in Grade 9, was shocked when they approached her about the book drive.

"They went so beyond what is

expected, to show kindness and that they care about Lord Dufferin, Regent Park and the people who live here. You could tell that they didn't think it was a big deal, that they weren't doing this big huge thing. But for us, it really was a huge thing. The kids couldn't believe they got to keep the books," said Ms. Baltazar.

"You can't teach the type of energy that Marten and Alex bring—they just come that way. They are advocates for our school community. I think that's the first time ever that it was two students who wanted to do this for us. That goes a long way in my opinion."

Ms. Baltazar recognizes that the twins bring a special energy to her classroom, be it in person or virtual.

"They have such a positive attitude and energy. They bring instant joy into the room, and they have this look that says, 'I can make you have fun while we learn, so let's do this.' You know that when they're around, we're going to have a good day today. Together or apart, they both have the same energy," said Ms. Baltazar. "Of course, virtual isn't the same as in person, but there's something about face time and seeing someone look at you with fondness, care and kindness that makes you feel like you're not alone. Alex and Marten understand that and like to be consistent about it. It makes a huge impact on my class. They're able to bring their natural style to virtual."

"I know that they'll bring their positive energy wherever they go. Their dedication and care always shows in their actions. You can tell they enjoy being there, and it makes all of us in Room 208 smile."