

# Lifestyles

*"I no longer live with the taste of failure in my mouth."*

## Skidrow Joe inspires students to go for their goals

by Kate Everson

**Belleville** - From a homeless drug addict in Vancouver in 1989, Skidrow Joe has come a long way. Joe Roberts told his story on December 3 at the Alumni Hall at Loyalist College where he had been a student in 1991.

"I always found humour in tragedy," he told the students. "If you learn not to take life so seriously, you can get through anything."

Roberts is now a successful businessman and president of Mindwear Design Communications, as well as being an inspirational speaker across the country.

"The right attitude determines your altitude," he said.

He encouraged the students to give of themselves. "If you ain't givin', you ain't livin'". In order to have character, you have to give back."

He said they should give themselves a standing ovation whenever they needed encouragement. He urged them to use the three words, "Yes, I can" when confronted with a challenge.

"I came to Belleville via a drug treatment house," Roberts said. "I asked myself if I could stay sober long enough to put my life together. And I answered, 'Yes I can.'"

Roberts said in 1989 he lived under the Georgia Street viaduct in Vancouver addicted to cocaine and heroin. He decided he had to face his demons head on or die. He moved to Ontario in 1991

and checked into a drug treatment centre, Serenity House, then later enrolled at Loyalist College.



Joe Roberts encouraged students at Loyalist to say, "Yes I can!" You can find him at <[www.joeroberts.ca](http://www.joeroberts.ca)>.

***"This is a story of how anyone can overcome their limitations."***

He said his whole problem with drugs goes back to his childhood. After his father died, a step-father brought hatred and violence into the home. At the age of nine, Joe retreated into the world of drugs because that seemed a safe place to be. At 15 he ran away from home and at 16 he was doing intravenous drugs. He quit school and by 18 was a street kid in Vancouver. By his early 20s his life was almost ruined.

"But this is not the story of a victim," he said. "This is a story of how anyone can overcome their limitations."

At Loyalist he began to excel in his

studies and bloom with self-esteem that had been dormant. When they called out his name on the Dean's List, his mother was aglow with peace and pride. He thanked Loyalist for what he had become.

"How do you go from Skid Row to CEO?" he asked. "It happens a day at a time. You make every day count."

Roberts added, "I no longer live with the taste of failure in my mouth."

The tragedy of life is that we wait too long to begin, faced with a cloud of fear and doubt. Joe urged students to take a step of faith and courage, to go after their goals.

"We are all born for a reason," he said. "Not all of us will discover why. I was fortunate. I got direction at Loyalist, and leadership. People accepted me, warts and all."

He told the students the next time they are faced with something adverse, to remember his story. "Put your arms in the air and say, Yes I can!"