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L&G student receives national scholarship

July 9, 2011

BRATTLEBORO -- A Leland & Gray Union High School graduate is one of five Vermonters to receive a scholarship from the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans.

The Alger association announced last week that Thomas Pentoney, a 18-year-old from Windham, was a recipient of the scholarship. This is the first time the association has offered state scholarships in Vermont.

"I was kind of surprised. I wasn't thinking that I was going to win such a prestigious award, but I was really excited that I won," said Pentoney, who heard about the scholarship at his high school. "I went and applied online, and I decided to write an essay about one of the people who is part of the Horatio Alger foundation, so they gave me a list of people and I knew several of them, so it was easy to do."

For his essay, Pentoney chose Pearl Buck, Nobel Prize-winning author of "The Good Earth" and one-time Vermont resident, speaking on how her writing spoke to him on a personal level.

"When I write, I'm very honest and I really just say exactly what I feel. I don't try to hype up my paper or myself, I just state the truth," he said.

Pentoney will receive \$5,000 toward his college education.

According to the association, Pentoney and the other four Vermont high school students were selected for the Horatio Alger Vermont Scholarship because they persevered in overcoming adversity while succeeding academically, contributing to the community and exhibiting exemplary character.

"We are privileged to provide scholarships to the deserving students from Vermont to attend college and achieve the American dream," said Tony Novelly, president and chief executive officer of the Horatio Alger Association in a statement.

"These students have overcome significant challenges in their lives and have become stronger, more determined people because of it," Novelly said.

Carrie Blewitt, spokeswoman for the association, said there are more than 15,000 applicants nationwide for the scholarship in 2011.

"Everybody applying, applies for the national scholarship, which is worth \$20,000. So those stories that have the most adversity and the ability for the student to overcome that adversity and that they want an education, those applicants rise to the top of the pile and they get the national scholarship," Blewitt said.

Seventy-six Vermonters applied for the scholarships. More than 850 state scholarships to students were awarded this year throughout the country.

Pentoney said he will attend Roger Williams University in Rhode Island for architecture.

"For the past two years in high school, I took a class in Brattleboro for architecture, so I'm going to start out with architecture and probably move more toward engineering because the job field is better. And I'm interested in both so, I can't really go wrong," he said.

The Vermont scholarships were made possible by the Suzanne and Walter Scott Foundation. The donation helps bring the association closer to its goal of providing scholarships in all 50 states for the first time in its history.

Pentoney wrote a letter to the Scott Foundation to thank them for the support.

The application for the 2012 Horatio Alger scholarships will become available on Aug. 1 at the association's website:

www.horatioalger.org/scholarships

Since its founding in 1947, the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans honors the achievements of those who have succeeded in spite of adversity and encourages young people to pursue their dreams through higher education.

The Horatio Alger Association offers three annual scholarship programs: the National Scholarship Program, state scholarship programs and graduate grants. More than \$87 million in scholarships through 2012 has been awarded.