

# The Independent Observer

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## Southmoreland grad is Horatio Alger scholarship winner

*Honor is first ever for a Southmoreland student.*

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THE INDEPENDENT-OBSERVER

Overcoming adversity is a lesson one 2008 Southmoreland graduate has had to learn early. This spring his perseverance and determination has paid off.

Chris Wesling of Ruffs Dale is the first Southmoreland student to ever be awarded the Horatio Alger Association Scholarship. The national scholarship worth \$20,000 is awarded to young people who have triumphed over adversity to achieve success. The association awards more than \$12 million annually in college scholarships. In 2008, 108 were honored out of 36,000 applicants nationwide, including Wesling, four were from Pennsylvania.

"Getting this scholarship is the start of something better," said Wesling.

Recounting his decision to apply for the scholarship Wesling stated, "I thought this scholarship was for me."

At the age of two Wesling's parents' marriage ended, and he remained with his mother. "For the next three to four years," admits Wesling "I suffered physical, emotional, mental, every abuse possible. All the bad things I encountered I never thought I'd make it. I never felt

safe."

As part of the scholarship application process Wesling wrote several essays concerning his life's experiences. "The truth hurts," he said openly. "But (my mother's) alcohol and substance abuse was real. I was in danger the whole time."

As part of his parents' divorce, Wesling's father was granted custody was to seek psychological help for his son.

Upon the suggestion of his stepmother, Wesling sought the services of Carol Hughes, Greensburg.

"Carol was great. She got me to feel comfortable and I began to tell how I felt." Hughes helped Wesling understand that he cannot change how other people behave and everyone is responsible for his or her own actions.

Presently, Wesling describes his maternal relationship as "pretty much non-existent" and humbly, he admits "I deserve this (scholarship) after all that I have overcome, it wouldn't mean as much without the support system of my family."

Wesling now resides with his father, Chris, Sr., stepmother, Carol and stepsister, Caitlin.

Notified in January that he had won the scholarship, Wesling was invited to attend an all-expense-paid conference for new scholars in Washington D.C. in early April.

The four-day conference

included workshops during which scholars shared their stories and gained comfort with their new colleagues. "It gave me hope to see these kids who had lived through similar circumstances. I felt like I had a new family."

For Wesling however the highlight of the conference was when the scholars were welcomed as guests into the U.S. Supreme Court. "It was over the top," exclaimed Wesling. "All the justices in the Supreme Court were standing and clapping and congratulating us as we walked through with our award medals. It was incredible."

As a lifetime member of the Horatio Alger Association, Wesling joins the likes of Bob Dole, Carol Burnett, Hank Aaron and Lou Dobbs. Since his induction, he has also learned he is receiving an additional \$3,500 scholarship from Penn State University, which is connected with the Horatio Alger Award. It is Wesling's plan to attend Penn State Main Campus this fall as a psychology major, possibly with nutrition minor.

"I want to get into psychology," concluded Wesling, "so no kid has to go through what I've gone through. I want to help them progress through the hardships as I have. Perseverance is my reward."



From left: Horatio Alger Association Award recipient Chris Wesling, Jr. admits the scholarship would not mean as much without the support system of his family, Caitlin, Carol, and Chris, Sr.