

Oak Park senior gets \$20,000 college scholarship

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Paying for college just got a whole lot easier for Adrian Hardin.

The Oak Park High School senior will receive a \$20,000 Horatio Alger scholarship, given to only 100 students across the country.

“It was kind of a surprise,” Hardin said of the award. “I didn’t think I would win it.”

The college scholarship is given to students who not only have good grades, but who also demonstrate integrity and perseverance while overcoming adversity. Students must also have financial need and plans to attend college.

Hardin has certainly tackled challenges in his life.

He moved to the Kansas City area from Texas so he could help his sister, who was struggling financially. This is his first year at Oak Park High School, in the North Kansas City School District.

In addition to his work in the classroom, Hardin works more than 40 hours a week to help support his family, and regularly watches his nephews.

“I work all the time in order to help her out,” he said.

When he isn’t in school or at work, Hardin is on the football field perfecting his skills in the sport.

His hard work on the field has paid off. Hardin, who also lives on his own, recently accepted a scholarship to play football at Missouri Valley College in Marshall next year.

The senior admits balancing school, work and football is a challenge and said he isn’t sure how’s he’s managed to do it.

“It’s a blessing I guess,” he said. “It’s really hard.”

He tries to get most of his school work done during the day during several study hall periods he built into his schedule. That way, after school he can concentrate on work, family and football.

The Horatio Alger scholarship hasn’t changed his plans for college, but it has given him more peace of mind.

“It solidified my decision and now my college is paid for and I don’t have to worry about that,” he said.

Lori Dameron, the school's gifted resource specialist, said she sees the scholarship as a chance for Hardin to reach his potential in post-secondary education.

"This is a door opening for him," she said.

She described him as a humble student who works hard and never lets the adversity he faces in life affect his determination to succeed.

"He didn't use that as a crutch," she said. "He just didn't let that stop him."

Hardin is the second Oak Park High School student to receive the honor in recent years. Sohail Jouya was also awarded a \$20,000 scholarship from the Horatio Alger National Scholarship Program last year.

Dameron said she is thrilled another student from Oak Park has been recognized and said she hopes it's a great sign for Hardin's future.

Hardin will travel to Washington, D.C., to accept the honor this spring. He's excited for the trip, but admits it's also a little intimidating.

"It's kind of scary, he said. "I have to talk to Congress."