

Teen Reaps Rewards of Hard Work

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Springfield High School senior Jordan Magill-Starr loves to sing, act and play the piano. He leads student ministries, is involved in the Mr. Springfield High School fundraising pageant and serves as student body president.

A schedule like his might exhaust someone else, but not this teenager, who also has made sure he's had enough time to apply for his choice colleges and scholarships.

For Magill-Starr, hard work has paid off. He is one of 104 students in the United States and Puerto Rico chosen this year to receive a \$20,000 Horatio Alger National Scholarship intended to help fund their college educations.

"I was incredulous. I couldn't believe it was happening," Magill-Starr said about learning of the award.

The awards are given to deserving young people who have "demonstrated integrity and determination in overcoming adversity, academic potential and the personal aspiration to make a unique contribution to society," according to the nonprofit Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans Inc.

The organization, formed in 1947, is named after the American writer Horatio Alger Jr. — whose name has become synonymous with "rags to riches" tales of young males reaching the American Dream through hard work.

Magill-Starr said he found a more cheerful attitude about life in middle school, when he developed a deeper relationship with God.

"Most of the things that I take part in are connected to my faith, and that isn't a chore so much as a blessing," Magill-Starr said. "It helps when you're doing things you're passionate about."

Magill-Starr recalls his sixth- and seventh-grade years as difficult ones. He didn't have many friends, and he struggled with depression and loneliness, some of it stemming from family problems in his early years.

He was invited to attend WyldLife, a middle school ministry program, and it changed everything: With his new faith in God and the friendships he made, Magill-Starr was no longer depressed. He had a community he belonged in.

He is involved in Young Life, a campus ministry for high school students. He co-leads New Eternal Touch, a Bible study group, with his friend, Tony Scarcello, and his sister, Marlie Magill-Starr.

Outside of school, he is a member of Springfield Faith Center.

"I think I'm generally hard-working, optimistic, sociable, personable," Magill-Starr said. "I don't think I could have described myself with any of those terms five years ago."

Leading and preparing messages each week for the campus ministry groups have made him realize he might like to be a minister. He's also considering being a choral director or an English teacher.

George Fox University in Newberg, a highly ranked Christian college, is solidly at the top of the schools Magill-Starr is considering. He's also been accepted at the University of Oregon, the UO's Robert D. Clark Honors College and Corban College in Salem.

Magill-Starr applied for the Horatio Alger scholarship online after learning about it through his school's career center. He decided he was qualified because "leadership is a big part of what I do at Springfield."

He's also active in the school's choir and theater programs, having played the lead in the musical his sophomore and junior years.

"He was good, too," said Marilyn Magill, Magill-Starr's mom, who works as a manager at a couple of local restaurants. She is so excited about her son's success that she seems to bubble over with pride.

"I can't even tell you," she said about his singing. "He brings chills to you."

In addition to the Horatio Alger award, Magill-Starr is being considered for a presidential leadership scholarship at George Fox that, when added to his other scholarships, would cover all the \$40,000-per-year cost of his education.

Magill-Starr's family doesn't have much money, so he's grateful to be able to go to college without having to take out student loans.

His mom always has wanted a lot for her kids, Magill-Starr said, working hard to help them and expecting a lot from them, too.

"I just figured the least I could do to return the favor is succeed, academically at least," Magill-Starr said.

The scholarship is a credit to all the hard work the teenager has put in the past few years, said Jared Taylor, Springfield High School's campus supervisor.

"I think he's reaping the reward of who he is as a person," Taylor said. "It's all those little things that Jordan does."

In addition to the money, the award meant a several-day trip to Washington, D.C., earlier this month. Next will come high school graduation and a final college decision, a summer spent traveling with friends before serving at the Young Life summer camp in Antelope, and finally life as a college student.

"I'm excited," Magill-Starr said. "I'm ready to move on to the next part of my life."