



Student focusing on science to take him places

Herman Khan says a love of the unknown is one of the major motivations for his studies

By JILLIAN JORGENSEN
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Herman Khan has won a lot of awards.

The Staten Island Tech senior was the only Intel Science Talent Search finalist in the city, he won the New York Times College Scholarship and the Albert Shanker College Scholarship, and he is being followed around by a documentary crew making a film called "Whiz Kids."

But he believes that one award stands out: a \$20,000 scholarship from the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, given to students who overcome adversity.

Due to a personal family crisis, the Khans have faced financial problems in the last decade. Khan declined to discuss these, citing the sensitivity of the matter. The Yale-bound senior is one of

just 105 winners chosen from 35,000 applicants, but that is not why the award is so special to him.

"It speaks to me the most. I've had to do something to get here and I've had to overcome so much," the Todt Hill resident said in a Staten Island Tech classroom.

In addition to his studies, Khan said he also had to worry about household finances, something that many other young people don't even think about. He also spends time helping his mother, who is ill, with household chores and errands. This made concentrating on schoolwork difficult at times, he said.

Despite these worries, the 17-year-old senior created a new method of determining the age of fossilized crocodilian teeth using electronic spin resonance, earning him a spot among the top 40 contestants in the Intel contest and national recognition as a science researcher.

He worked as a paper carrier for the Advance for two years to supplement the family income, but quit when he realized that focusing on his science research would allow

him both to learn and to earn an average of \$3,500 a year in awards money.

His financial troubles at home motivated him to take his science research to a higher level, the student said.

"If I want to get somewhere in my life, then it's my job to get there," he said.

Khan, a bright, young man who smiles when he talks about science, said a love of the unknown is his other major motivation.

"True science is not memorizing things out of a textbook. True science is venturing into the unknown and writing a textbook."

For his teachers, Khan's success came as no surprise.

"What makes a good researcher is that they have to be a little aggressive, they have to be consistent and persistent, and they have to just constantly ask questions, and he had all those qualities," said Carmen Irizarry, a science teacher at Tech who was Herman's senior mentor in the school's Science and Engineering Research Program.

Khan's success has come with sacrifices. In order to work on his project, he spent

his summers at a laboratory in Flushing, Queens, visited the electronic spin resonance lab at Williams College in Massachusetts several times a year and traveled by public transportation to his Williams College mentor's home in Long Island, often getting home in the early hours of the morning.

"It's definitely hurt my social life," Khan said.

Despite an Intel project that he said "has vast implications in the world of human evolutionary studies," Khan said most of the time he just feels like a "regular kid."

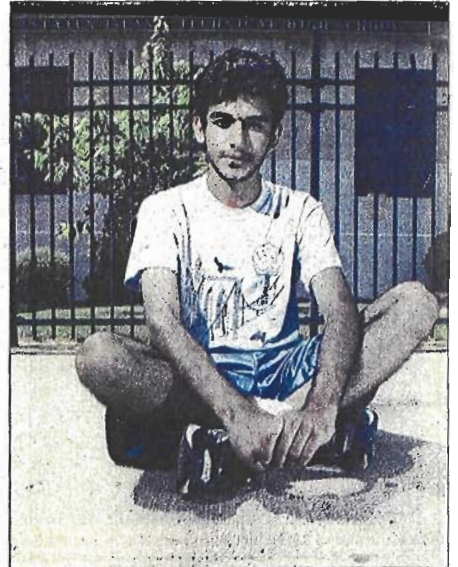
In addition to continuing scientific research at Yale, Khan said he looks forward to trying new academic subjects and joining many clubs.

"I'm ready to explore," he said with a smile.

Khan was as exuberant about the end of the school year as any typical high school student.

"I'm ready to fly. I want to get out of this nest now."

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Staten Island Tech student Herman Khan has received multiple awards and scholarships for his work in science.