

Elverado student awarded life-changing scholarship

BY EMILY BRITTON
THE SOUTHERN

ELKVILLE — An Elverado High School senior was awarded a life-changing scholarship this year that will allow him to chase his dream, despite the adversity he has faced in his life.

Robert Johnson, 18, received the Horatio Alger Scholarship, which will allow him to attend college, something he says he would not have been able to do otherwise.

"It gives me a chance to attend college. I'm not sure I would have even went because of the financial aspect," Johnson said. "It's giving me a shot at my dream."

Johnson's dream is to obtain a degree in architecture and give back to the community because he understands the struggle that comes with financial difficulties. Growing up in a single-parent household, he was able to see the amount of work his mother was forced to put in to provide for him and his three brothers.

"I plan on going into architecture and later starting my own firm," Johnson said. "Then I want to help with things like Habitat for Humanity."

"You know those home make-over shows?" Johnson asked. "I would like to do that—be a designer for people who are less fortunate."

Johnson says receiving the scholarship has made him realize that he can make a difference, and he hopes he can reach out to others in his situation in the future.

JOHNSON: Elverado student awarded Horatio Alger Scholarship

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The scholarship is designed to show students who are facing hardships that their future can be bright. The application process involves three essays describing an adversity the student is working to overcome, their career goals and a comparison between them and a member of the Horatio Alger Association.

The third essay requires applicants to read the inspiring stories behind the numerous association members, including Oprah, Clarence Thomas and Hank Aaron. The association accepts new members each year based on the candidate's success in overcoming adversity in their lives.

Johnson was one of 108

students chosen to receive the award this year, and with over 36,000 applications submitted, he admits he was surprised when he heard the good news.

In fact, Johnson would not have even known about the scholarship program if it wasn't for his teacher and past scholarship winner, Michael Tow.

Tow was awarded the scholarship in 2000 and is now a field director for the program. He convinced Johnson to submit the application and was the first to inform him of the award.

"He surprised me with it after a basketball game," Johnson said.

The amazement continued when Johnson learned of the benefits he will receive from the program, as well as the

schools he plans to attend. Johnson was awarded \$20,000 from the association, a laptop, health insurance and access to an internship program when he is ready to begin working.

After contacting John A. Logan College and Southern Illinois University Carbondale, he learned of even more benefits. Both are partner schools, which offer more scholarship money to the winners. JALC will allow Johnson to take classes tuition-free and SIUC will double the original

scholarship amount, giving him another \$40,000. He will also have the opportunity to attend graduate school at no extra cost.

Along with the monetary contributions, Tow says the association offers a variety of

benefits that go far beyond any other scholarship program.

"One of the great benefits is the incredible networks he'll have access to," Tow said. "The association has members in all walks of life, business, sports, entertainment, politics, and they're always caring toward the kids."

Despite his hardships, Johnson now has an opportunity to fulfill his dream and he hopes to inspire others they way the association's members have inspired him.

"It's opened my eyes to giving back," Johnson said. "Now I plan on helping others who are in a situation like mine."

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