

# County rolls out 'red carpet' to recognize students with Classy Awards

By KATE GODFREY  
Observer staff

Prince William County School District celebrated the accomplishments of the county's students and staff June 4 in C.D. Hylton High School at the second annual Classy Awards ceremony.

Steven L. Walts, superintendent of schools, called award recipients "the cream of the crop" during his opening remarks.

From the red carpeted entrance to the standing ovation for the area's summa cum laude (with highest praise) graduating seniors at the finale, the event had all the makings of a small scale Hollywood gala.

Some 33 elementary through high school students, first place winners at the Prince William Regional Science Fair, were presented with Classy Awards. Jacob Lattin, son of Occoquan's school board representative, Grant Lattin, was among them. Emma Duhnke from Westridge Elementary School (WES), and Bridget Little and Mary McClellan of Potomac High School were awarded grand prizes, in addition to their first place wins.

Seventh grader Abhinav Venkat of Bull Run Middle School



Recognized for excellence in the Fine and Performing Arts, specifically their Student Literary Magazine, WSHS students Scott Stackley, Matt Sammartino, Pierce Schreiber, Chris Lee; teacher/sponsor, Cathy Hailey and principal, Alan Ross; as well as Paula Discipulo, Alan Fu enjoy the buffet before the official Classy Awards ceremony.

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(MS) stepped forward to receive a Classy Award for his recent participation in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. He made it through to the sixth of 13 rounds.

This year, area robotic teams did well in competitions from the

local through the world games. Battlefield High School's Robocats team took Classy Awards for taking first place for its website in Las Vegas, NV, at the Regional FIRST Robotics Competition. Osbourn Park High School (OPHS)

was recognized for its "Rookie All Star Award" at this year's world competition.

Excellence in the arts was recognized, as students and teachers from Woodbridge Senior High School (WSHS) were called forth

to accept their Classy Awards.

Sarah Crossland won for her recent receipt of the Gold Key for excellence in non-fiction, as well as the National Silver Award for creative writing. Another WSHS student, Scott Stackley, winner of the Gold Key for excellence in poetry, was also a Classy winner. WSHS teacher, staff member and sponsor for the school's literary magazine, Cathy Hailey, accepted the Classy award on behalf of the student staff for excellence in student literary magazines.

The countless hours of practice with their musical instruments paid double dividends for six area students who were accepted for placement on the All-Virginia Orchestra. They are Shannon Fairbank of WSHS, Andrew Giblin of Stonewall Jackson (SJHS), Tiffany Hom from Garfield High School, Yoo Na Kim of Battlefield High School (BHS), Allison Ko from SJHS and Matthew Majors of OPHS.

Keith Johnson, associate superintendent for human resources, presented members of the OPHS track team with Classy awards for winning several regional and state-

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# Classy Awards winners went "above and beyond," says school official

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wide track competitions in both men's and women's events. Johnson also congratulated Dayelle Kent-Robinson of Brentsville District High School (BDHS) for taking first place in the Virginia AA indoor track high jump and 55 meter hurdles for winning "literally by leaps and bounds."

Acknowledgement of Prince William County School District's summa cum laude graduates crowned the evening.

Waltz remarked those students have "achieved the very pinnacle of academic excellence by maintaining a 4.0 or higher [grade point average], for all four years of high school."

Brian Heffron, assistant principal of Beville Middle School, said these students earned this designation through their mastery of time management, devotion to learning and their personal commitment to excellence.

Heffron said he recognized many of them from his days as an eighth grade teacher at Graham Park Middle School or from his time teaching at Forest Park High School.

"Even back then, you could tell these students were going to be very special. They stood apart

from your average students. The difference between mediocrity and excellence requires a little more effort, and these kids were willing to give it above and beyond," Heffron observed.

Of the 560 students members of this year's graduating class at WSHS, 25 were graduating with the designation of summa cum laude. Some 45 students from WSHS account for a total of \$2,597,164 in scholarships, grants and various other awards.

This year, Gar-Field High School graduated 507 seniors, 26 of them had the summa cum laude stamp of excellence on their diploma. An undetermined number of students account for a total of \$2,319,778.00 in scholarships from local organizations, colleges and private individuals.

Twenty-seven students from a graduating class of 621 at Osborn Park High School attained the distinction of summa cum laude, according to recent reports, and 83 students received a total of \$2,006,125 in scholarships and other awards.

Some graduates have advice for other students. Caitlin Annand-Baechtel from Gar-Field will be attending Emerson College in Bos-

ton, with a \$10,000 dean scholarship this fall. Her advice to high school students is, "Have fun. Don't let your life completely revolve around academics. Inject some time for relaxation or friends to balance it out."

Classy Award recipient, Noorul-huda "Huda" Mehdi, is ranked fourth in her graduating class at Gar-Field, with a GPA of 4.559. She plans to attend William and Mary in the fall of 2007 and hopes to become a doctor. Mehdi suggests students become involved in school activities to become well-rounded. She is involved in the Model UN, is co-captain of the school's "It's Academic" team and founder and president of the school's chapter of Amnesty International.

Wes Ruwisch believes it is important to "find what you love and pursue it," a philosophy he pursued to a double Classy Award for excellence in music and as a summa cum laude graduate from WSHS. He plays bassoon in the All Virginia Band.

Torrence Marunda of Gar-Field said he takes his inspiration from a video he was given as a child.

"If your mind can conceive it,

and you believe it, then you can achieve it," he notes. Marunda counsels students to get involved and surround themselves with people who will be a good influence. He is also a big fan of asking for help when you need it.

"I have had outstanding teachers and counselors, and they have given me support throughout my K through high school years in the Prince William County School system," he added.

"These kids are incredible," enthuses Heffron, but he doesn't stop there. He mentions one additional, special qualification these students possess, one more role they fill in the world where they

have spent time living and learning.

"Not everyone is from a 'perfect' family. These students become family and mentors for their peers. They push each other and their contemporaries in the direction they know they need to go. It may not result in an 'A,' but it is often the difference between an 'F' and a 'B,' and this is just as important, just as valuable."

"We would have to have a Classy Awards week if we were to recognize all of the truly honorable students, teachers and staff who work on behalf of the students in Prince William County. It is truly remarkable," Heffron asserted.

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