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Merit finalists excel in more than academics

MARY EARP

The three merit scholarship finalists, Emily Fischer, Avilash Cramer and Aaron Waller, seniors, are more than just role models in academics. Not only do they participate in activities including Eagle Scouts, National Honors Society and the International Science and Engineering Fair, along with a schedule loaded with advanced placement classes, but they hold a mutual respect for each other.

"I'm just glad all of us made it to this point," Waller said.

More than one million students take the PSAT each year. To become a finalist, they all scored in the top third of the 50,000 highest scores from the PSAT/NMSQT test scores. Every finalist only had positive things to say about the other finalists.

"Aaron is very bright and competent," Cramer said about Waller. "He's caring, especially about the community."



Photo by Mark Poppert

Avilash Cramer, Aaron Waller and Emily Fischer, seniors, were named National Merit finalists. They have learned to balance overloaded schedules with a multitude of activities outside of school.

Waller's demanding schedule includes AP Economics, AP Spanish, AP

Calc BC, AP Environmental Science, AP English and an independent study in AP

Computer Science. Outside of school, Waller is an Eagle Scout and a member of Troop 149,

where he participates in a large amount of community service. His father, the scout master, is one person that has influenced Waller.

"He's been a driving force behind my achievements," Waller said.

Waller's top choices for college are Cal Tech and MIT, where he hopes to someday obtain a career in engineering. Also pursuing a career in engineering is Cramer.

"Avi is really driven," Waller said. "He's definitely the best or one of the best students in the class."

Cramer, similar to Waller, has a remarkable schedule including AP Economics, AP Biology, AP Calc BC, Honors Humanities, and AP Environmental Science. Many of his achievements are found in the CREST- Jane Goodall Science Symposium, the yearly science symposium for high school students. Last year he worked with a remote operated vehicle for saving people, and won at the local fair. He then competed in the International Science and Engineering Fair in Reno, Nevada. This year he is developing a sensor for nitrate in mud.

Cramer applied to 17 different colleges, and is awaiting the reply to choose which he would like to attend. He also participates in Model U.N., cross country, science bowl and is in a choir downtown. Also interested in singing is the third finalist, Fischer.

Fischer is described as "wicked smart" by Cramer, and she considers herself very "self-motivated." She is currently in choir, AP Physics, English, AP Spanish, Fiber Arts and takes a Linear Algebra class at PSU. She's in math club and NHS, along with Oregon Youth Chorale. She hopes to attend college at Brown, Stanford, Yale or Duke. She's considering studying math or linguistics in college, but isn't sure what she wants to do yet.

The main advice given by these three students, for those following in their footsteps, was to pay attention in class and to take the PSAT.

"Just take the PSAT," Cramer said. "A lot of people didn't. Make sure you know when to take it. It's worth it."

Thespians advance eight to State competition

LEXI WELP

After a day of competing at the Regional Acting Competition at Milwaukie High School, WLHS has eight entries going to the State Conference, more than have ever gone in the past. The competition represented the preliminaries for the Thespian State Conference, which will be held on April 8, 9 and 10.

"The State Thespian Conference isn't just a competition. It's a conference full of shows, performers, workshops, tech awards, acting awards, troupe bonding and just all out fun. State is just an absolute dreamland for a theatrical person," Ashley Welp, Solo Acting competitor, said. State also includes two dances and a chance to meet and connect with interesting people, according to Welp.

"I'm so pleased that our performers were recognized for their talent and hard work, and I'm very excited that they now get to take their competitions pieces to the next level," Annie Kaiser, performing arts coordinator, said.

Three entries will be going to State for Solo Musical, including Emma Davis, Lisa

Wang and Samantha Forsey, juniors. Two duo teams will be competing at State, including Michael Johnson and Anna Stapleton, juniors, for Duo Dramatic; and Tyler Whitcomb, senior, with Sophie Starks-Madsen, junior, for Duo Comedic. The last category students are entering in is Solo acting. Both Alyssa Johnston,

senior, and Laura Stanten, junior, qualified along with Welp, sophomore who took first place in Solo Novice. Additionally, Katherine Dudley, senior, will be going to State with her self-written play. "I was extremely surprised to learn I had received first place. Everyone worked exceptionally hard, and it

was clear that there were many individuals who were dedicated to their pieces," Welp said. After the Regional Acting Competition, many students began to focus their attention on the school play, "Romeo and Juliet". However, once the play was done the rehearsals and practices began once again.

After "Romeo and Juliet" Jessica Murray, Thespian Co-Director, and Kaiser plan to meet with the competitors going to State and help them adjust and refine their pieces. "It's exciting to come back to a scene or a song and get it ready for another competition; because you spent some time away from it, that distance can provide you with the opportunity to find innovative and compelling ways to interpret the piece," Kaiser said.

As April approaches, Welp is looking forward to refining her Solo Acting piece. "There are so many wonderfully gifted actors and performers at WLHS. I am extremely proud of my friends who made it to State and just as proud of the ones who didn't," Welp said. "I am really looking forward to State and can't wait to compete again."



Photo by Jon Ares

Romeo (Michael Johnson, junior), kills Tybalt (Peter Bonoff, junior), during a fight between the Montagues and Capulets in "Romeo and Juliet." Johnson qualified with Anna Stapleton, junior, for State with his Duo Dramatic performance at the Regional Acting Competition. Bonoff will also be performing at State with Avery Breyne-Cartwright, senior.