11 area students win Merit awards

Eleven area students are among more than 2,600 who have been named winners of Merit Scholarships funded by colleges and universities.

These Merit Scholars join those who have won scholarships donated by corporations and by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

They are:

■ William Gage, a resident of Birmingham, is a senior at Seaholm High School. He has received a George Washington University Merit Scholarship. Gage is interested in a career in writing and philosophy.

■ Kelly Mann, a resident of Birmingham, is a senior at Seaholm High School. Mann has received a Northwestern University Merit Scholarship. Mann is interested in a career in mathematics.

■ Michael Sutherland, a resident of Oakland Township, is a senor at Lake Orion Community High School. He will accept a University of Toledo Merit Scholarship to study engineering.

■ Amanda Amos, a resident of Farmington Hills, is a senior at Farmington High School. She has accepted a Michigan State University Merit Scholarship. She is interested in a career in international business.

■ Gary Meyer, a resident of Troy, is a senior at Athens High School. He is a winner of a Michigan State University Merit Scholarship and plans to work in the science of neurology.

■ Megan Strohmeyer, a resident of Troy, is a senior at Athens High School. She has won a Michigan State University Merit Scholarship to study veterinary medicine.

■ Jennifer Gibbs, a resident of Walled Lake, is a senior at Wixom Christian School. She has received a Wheaton College Merit Scholarship. She has not decided on her field of study.

■ Kathryn Cranston, a resident of West Bloomfield, is a senior at West Bloomfield High School. She has won a Michigan State University Merit Scholarship and will study biochemistry.

■ Andrew Gariepy, a resident of West Bloomfield, is a senior at Harrison High School in Farmington Hills. He has won a Rice University Merit Scholarship and will study biochemistry.

■ Deepak Malhotra, a resident of West Bloomfield, is a senior at West Bloomfield High School. Malhotra has received a Michigan State University Merit Scholarship and wants to study computer science.

■ Morris Slutsky, a resident of West Bloomfield, is a senior at Harrison High School in Farmington Hills. He has accepted a Michigan State University Merit Scholarship to study chemistry.

Some 115 private and 85 public higher education institutions offer Merit Scholarships for use at their institution. They provide between $250 and $2,000 annually for up to four years of undergradute study.

AIDS victims ask communities for education, support and love

See related column.

BY JUDITH DONER BERNE
STAFF WRITER

"Your mother won't be able to fix it."

That's what Cranbrook science teacher Shelley Gesson told the 30 or so young people in an audience of about 150 who came to The Community House in Birmingham Monday to learn more about AIDS.

With a portion of the AIDS quilt as a backdrop, Gesson, an upbeat, refreshing 26-year-old who is HIV positive, challenged them to "never put yourself in the position that you can't make a sexual choice. This is not fixable."

Then she challenged parents "to talk to your kids about making decisions" about such things as drugs and alcohol and intimacy."

Gesson was the final speaker in the three-hour forum, part of The Community House "Viewpoints" series. It dealt with the history, myths and misconceptions about the disease, issues in the workplace and featured a teen theater troupe's skit on prevention.

Co-sponsored by the Michigan AIDS Fund, the overriding theme was that AIDS does not discriminate — everyone is susceptible.

Tears shed

An audience that grew steadily over the three hours was alternately fed factual information and moved to tears by speakers, several of whom carry and/or have a family member with the HIV/AIDS virus.

Gesson, her father, uncle and a younger adopted brother all contracted the HIV virus while being treated for hemophilia. She told of her denial and of the trauma of her brother's death. She also told of her first-date decision to tell her now-husband Gary Gesson, a fellow Cranbrook teacher who was in the audience, that she had the virus.

"He said, 'Oh, no problem.' I was absolutely floored."

She urged people to have compassion and to set aside their judgments on all AIDS patients. "I am incredibly insulted when people come up to me and say, 'you didn't deserve this.'

"No one deserves or asks for this disease. I'm lucky I have a strong set of family and friends to support me. But I'm in the minority."

Sexual contact, blood to blood and mother to child are the only ways AIDS can be transmitted, she said. So, "I need to be bold. I need to laugh and I'm really not something to be feared."

The isolation she felt, which finally prompted her to tell the Cranbrook community, was echoed by other speakers.

Isolation, fear

Shirley Gach says hers was "the quintessential" family living happily in Bloomfield Township until their son, David, who was gay, contracted AIDS: "I could not tell my best friend. I lived in isolation and fear. I heard the gay jokes and AIDS jokes."

Memories: *Shirley Gach of Bloomfield Township breaks down for a moment as she recounts the loss of her son David to AIDS.*

David, a 1982 graduate of Brother Rice who graduated from the University of Michigan, died a year ago. Gach held up his U-M diploma and began to cry. "I guess I like to show it because he never had a party."

"You don't have to be promiscuous, whether gay or straight," Gach said. "It just takes once. He knew exactly who it was and where it was."

Like no other disease, it brings out the worst in our families, communities, ministers, doctors, Gach said. "There is no cure for AIDS. But there is a cure for indifference, for discrimination, for ignorance, for racism, for homophobia. The cure is education, compassion, love.

"I want our churches and temples to know they have a moral responsibility to talk about AIDS and awareness. I want people to become educated because no group should have to think they are unworthy."

Gach said she was proud to be a part of the program and proud of what the Birmingham schools have done to educate students about homosexuality.

Which brought up another point. According to Kathy Gerus, an HIV-positive representative of the Midwest AIDS Prevention Project, most school districts "won't let us talk to people who aren't seniors."

"That's often too late, according to Randall Pope, chief of HIV/AIDS prevention and intervention for the state Department of Health.

"This type of effort needs to be repeated in every community throughout Michigan," Pope said.

"Seventy percent of our high school graduates know the pleasures of sexual intercourse," he said. "I don't think the 'just say no' campaign works."

"The disease is in Birmingham. How are you going to handle your neighbor who has the HIV infection?" Pope asked.

Some responses

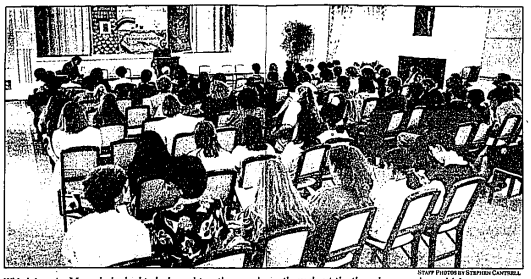
"This hasn't happened, but how can I help if I find out if somebody I know has AIDS?" asked Troy High School senior Michelle Thompson during a question and answer session.

"Touch them, hug them, show them you're not afraid," was the response.

Afterward, Amy Spears, a middle school student from Birmingham, said she was glad she had come. "It was better than going to a big lecture," she said.

"I don't think parents understand that we understand," said Dara Palazzolo, from Seaholm High School.

Pamela Hickox, who teaches in West Bloomfield Schools, said it's not just parents who are afraid for their children. "Our children worry about us as single parents."



STAFF PHOTOS BY STEPHEN CHATTRELL

Wide interest: *More chairs had to be brought as the crowd grew throughout the three-hour session, which was opened by the Rev. Roger Tilden of Birmingham.*

Attitudes matter: *"We are a phobic society," says state HIV/AIDS health chief Randall Pope with the Michigan AIDS quilt as his backdrop.*

Camp Oakland starts adolescent boot camp

Michigan's first boot camp for adolescent males, operated by Camp Oakland-Youth Programs, hosted a community open house and dedication ceremonies recently.

Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Township, dedicated the new facility at the Proud Lake State Recreation Area in Commerce Township.

Barry M. Grant, chief judge of Oakland County Probate Court, who encouraged Camp Oakland to launch the new program, also participated. The camp's goal is to provide adolescents with a structured regimen stressing physical and mental fitness, as well as good work habits and academics.

While other boot camps are for adults 18 and over, the Camp Oakland program serves an average age of 16½.

According to Camp Oakland executive director David Ballenberger, "we felt there was a group of boys out there who would benefit from a regimented, six-month stay that emphasizes self-discipline. These young men need to learn there are things you must do, whether you want to or not."

The program focuses on teaching independence, Ballenberger says, because "some boys won't have homes to which they can return. In addition, they are at the age where they should be learning to take care of themselves."

The boys have been referred by the Juvenile Division of Oakland County Probate Court, usually for violations that may have been felonies if the offenders were 18 or older.

Through contact with each boy and his parents, the program provides follow-up care for six months afterward.

The youths wear camouflage uniforms. They participate in one-hour calisthenics drills twice daily. They learn to salute and observe rules of military conduct.

"The program lends itself to discipline without being punitive," says Ballenberger. "It accomplishes a lot in terms of improving self-esteem and of teaching boys to do things they didn't think they could do."

The 25 boot camp participants spend half of each day in school. Physical labor involves clearing and maintaining the environmental health of the Proud Lake State Recreation Area where the program is located. A former NIKE missile base, the acreage is leased from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Boot camp supervisor is James C. Seibert of Lake Orion, former chief of police in Genesee County's Atlas Township.

The boot camp is at 9491 Wise Road, Commerce Township, which is also the location of the Daniel T. Murphy Day Student Center, also operated by Camp Oakland.

Based in Oxford, Camp Oakland provides residential or day student care and counseling for 138 adolescent boys and girls. The agency annually serves about 800 children and families through its eight treatment programs and three sites in Oakland and Lapeer counties. It's a private, non-profit corporation.

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Belle Isle attracts fans of all races

Handi[illegible] down hill[illegible] the usual montage of smiling faces trying to squeeze into the camera view at major sporting events. However, this year at First of America Free Prix Day on Belle Isle, you may see a number of faces shying away from the camera.

Since the event is annually held on a Friday, many of the expected 60,000 race enthusiasts will be escaping from a day of work or school hoping not to be caught by the watchful eye of the camera. Dedicated fans are expected to travel from as far as Canada and northern Michigan to enjoy a day of [illegible]

"I am o[illegible] joyed by t[illegible] into Free P[illegible] troit "Grand Prix President Robert McCabe, sponsor of the three-day race. In addition to the record-setting number of spectators, a record number of fans — nearly 43,000 are expected to view the Grand Prix race on Sunday.

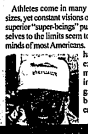
Race fans range in age and social backgrounds, from high-powered businessmen and women to fathers and sons reliving memories of past generations of racing legends. "The attraction of indy car racing seems to stem from inside race fans and isn't definable by gender, race or social status," commented McCabe. "The diversity of the audience itself plays a major role in the success of racing."

McCabe hopes track conditions continue to be as favorable as in past years. Rain delays have caused cancellations of the Grand Prix in the past.

Race officials assisted volunteers in rescuing the bewildered animal.

Athletes who drive [illegible]

Athletes come in many shapes and sizes, yet constant visions of physically superior "super-beings" pushing themselves to the limits seem to plague the minds of most Americans. This fallacy has led to the exclusion of many deserving athletic groups, one being race car drivers.



The argu[illegible] threatening decisions throughout a challenging three-hour race, displaying a level of concentration worthy of any athletic event.

Brayton set his sites on car racing early in life. The son of former Indy car driver Lee Brayton, Scott has been racing cars since he received a go-cart for his fifth birthday. Scott moved up from racing go-carts to open-wheel formula cars and the Formula Ford series. In 1981, Brayton, who hails from Coldwater, Mich., began racing [illegible] ing a test of athletic ability? The car expends all of the energy, not the driver."

The rationale becomes clear when you examine the word "athlete." An athlete is someone who takes part in competitive sports. No one can deny that racing cars is a competitive sport. So although race car drivers like Scott Brayton, for example, may not be able to run a mile in under five minutes or bring in the winning run in the ninth inning, they can make hundreds of life-

Brayton started his Indy car career by driving partial campaigns almost exclusively for his family's team. However, he made his mark in 1985 when he set a track-record lap time of 214.59 mph and qualified with a four-lap average speed of 212.354 on opening day of the Indy 500. This year, Scott, sponsored by First of America Bank, will drive No. 22, Amway's Winning Spirit Indy Car in the Detroit PPG Indy Car race, the Indianapolis 500, the Milwaukee 200 and the Michigan 500.

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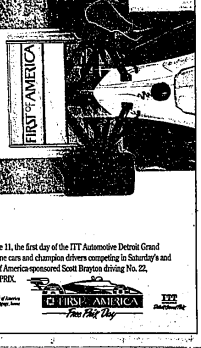
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