



JAMES AKAO
Churchill High School, Lincoln

Akao was a national merit scholar finalist and winner of the Michigan Math Prize Competition. "He got a splendid scholarship to Emory University in Atlanta," said his mother, Susan Poupard of Livonia.

"Then he went straight into the Ph.D. program at Berkeley. He won some prestigious awards along the way. He's worked hard and yet he always says 'I can't believe how lucky I am.'"

Akao was reached by phone at his job at the Institute for Advanced Math Study in Princeton, New Jersey. He reflected on the last 10 years.

"I think there was a whole series of good teachers at Churchill, people like Dick Braun, a physics teacher, and Mary Buda for math," he said.

"I feel lucky to be doing science now. At this point, I'm living a dream. The things I work on now are thrilling."

"My general area is computational physics. Essentially I set up experiments on a computer and often in a situation where there are millions of related equations. I try to find an overall solution to a collection of problems."

Akao earned bachelor's degrees in math and physics from Emory University in 1989. "I liked the atmosphere of a smaller school," he said.

He then accepted a fellowship offered by the Office of Naval Research to study at Berkeley, where he earned a doctorate last spring. He's doing post doctoral research now at Princeton and eventually would like to become a math professor at a research facility.

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THE FIRST ACADEMIC ALL-STARS TEAM

CLASS of 1985

LOOKING BACK AFTER 10 YEARS

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Observer's Academic All-Star program. This year's team - 13 strong - is profiled in a special section found inside today's paper. The first Observer Academic All-Star team was presented to readers on Thursday, May 2, 1985. Twelve outstanding scholars from local high schools told of their college plans and career ambitions.

The Observer attempted to contact that first group of All-Stars to report on their successes a decade later.

In the end, 10 members now living on the east and west coasts and points in between and beyond responded to our questions. Here's an update on members of that first team - the Observer Academic All-Star Class of 1985.

BY MARY RODRIGUE



ANDREA BREUHAN
Harrison High School, Farmington Hills

Breuhan graduated from Harrison with plans to attend the University of Michigan and possibly pursue law or other graduate studies. She's now working on a Ph.D. in economics at Stanford University in California.

"Hopefully I'll be done by the end of 1996," she said.

She received a bachelor of arts degree in economics from the U-M in 1989, graduating Phi Beta Kappa. She spent her junior year at the famed London School of Economics. She worked in Washington, D.C. for two years for the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics.

"It was an interesting job. I worked as an economist, a computer industry analyst. Then I came out here (California)," she said.

"I taught my own course last summer. Currently I coordinate the teaching assistants in the economics department."

Her eventual goal is to get a teaching job in a liberal arts college.

Breuhan credits many strong women teachers, especially her 7th and 10th grade math teachers Laura Minor and Susan Schultz, with being early guiding forces.

"The key to economics is math. I never felt any obstacle to what I wanted to do, or that girls shouldn't like math," she said.

Breuhan is single and enjoys outdoor activities and cooking South East Asian and Indian dishes. Her parents, Marilyn and Ronald Breuhan, live in Farmington Hills.

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MARK LADD
John Glenn High School, Westland

Ladd was a National Merit Scholarship finalist and winner of an all expense paid trip to Germany, courtesy of the American Association of Teachers of German.

Coincidentally, he's back in Europe now on assignment for GE Medical Systems at University Hospital in Zurich, Switzerland.

"He's writing some software for them," said Floyd Ladd, his father, who lives in Westland with Mark's mother, Novella.

"Mark never made less than a 4.0 grade point average at the U-M," said his father. "He was awarded three fellowships and accepted one from the Office of Naval Research."

Ladd received a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering from U-M in 1989, and a master's degree in the same field in 1991 from Stanford University. He went to work for Milwaukee based GE Medical Systems after graduation.

He was the liaison engineer sent to Zurich when the company sold positron emission tomography (PET) to the hospital.

While at Stanford, Ladd co-authored technical papers with a professor and monitored earthquake equipment. He speaks fluent German, aided by living in Germany for 18 months.

"My German teacher in high school, Mrs. Hildebrand Kelley, led me to that opportunity," said Ladd by phone from Zurich. "Naturally my parents early on were very influential for me."

"Being an Observer academic all-star was interesting. I didn't realize I was part of the first team."

Ladd enjoys skiing and traveling. His father plans to visit him in Zurich in April.

"My dad was stationed in Germany after World War II. We plan to go there," Ladd said.

He plans to stay in Zurich after his current work assignment ends to pursue a doctorate at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. He will continue research work for his employer.

He then accepted a fellowship offered by the Office of Naval Research to study at Berkeley, where he earned a doctorate last spring. He's doing post doctoral research now at Princeton and eventually would like to become a math professor at a research facility.

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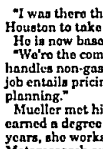
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THOMAS MUELLER
Stevenson High School, Livonia

When he graduated from Stevenson, Mueller had an eye on medical or dental school and a scholarship waiting from Indiana University.

"Ten years ago I didn't have a clue that I'd end up here," said Mueller from his home in suburban Houston.

"One of the main reasons I went to Indiana was that I wasn't certain of a career path and they allowed that flexibility."

Mueller graduated from Indiana in 1989 (Phi Beta Kappa) with a degree in chemistry. He minored in history and economics.

"Junior year I shifted gears to business. I was hired by Shell Oil in Houston after graduation. After nine months of training, he moved back to Michigan where he was in sales for Shell Oil with the entire state his territory."

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CHRISTOPHER RITO
Detroit Catholic Central, Redford

Rito won a Kmart National Merit Scholarship to Kalamazoo College. He also won a first place award in the Detroit Science Fair and was a member of the All Scholastic Catholic team and the Scholarship Athlete team.

He was on the Observer all area team for cross country two times.

"I still run, but certainly not as fast," he said from his office in Indianapolis, where he works for the Eli Lilly Co. as an organic chemist.

"I still have my (academic all-star) certificate with my running medals down in the basement."

Rito earned a degree in chemistry from Kalamazoo in 1989, then a master's degree in organic chemistry from the University of Wisconsin in 1991. He did internships at Upjohn and Kellogg Co. in Battle Creek before joining Eli Lilly in January 1992.

He met his wife, Debe, of Deer Lodge, Montana while doing a research project at the University of Montana. The couple has two daughters, Victoria, 2, and Angelina, 10 months. A former music student, Debe now teaches music out of their home.

"Since I started here at Eli Lilly, I was working in diabetes research," he said. "I helped develop a drug for diabetic retinopathy, to help prevent diabetes from going blind. Testing in humans will be coming soon. That's been a major accomplishment here."

Rito is also athletic director at his parish, St. Thomas Moore in Mooreville and he coaches a junior high basketball team.

His parents are Robert and Aline Rito of Westland.



BETH SADLER
Merry High School, Farmington Hills

Sadler was a National Merit finalist and winner of the Madame Curie award from the Society of Women Engineers.

"I graduated from U-M in 1989 with a bachelor of science degree in cellular and molecular biology," she said.

She went to work for Parker Amchem, an industrial metal finishing company in Madison Heights.

"I'm a technical service chemist," she said. Half her responsibilities involve traveling around the country and Canada visiting customers and acting as a technical service representative. She is also involved in research and in-house training programs in her Madison Heights office.

"Our customer base includes the auto industry, anyone who buys metal furniture and appliances, basically anything that requires rustproofing."

Sadler says she always enjoyed math and science and "the teachers at Merry were wonderful."

"I always knew I would go into the science field, but what I do is more business oriented," she said.

She's single and enjoys traveling.

"I just got back from Mexico last month," said Sadler, who also won a certificate of merit in Spanish in high school.

She lives in Livonia, as do her parents, Robert and JoAnn Sadler.



DOUGLAS TROJANOWSKI
Lutheran High Northwest

A National Merit Scholar and class valedictorian, Trojanowski planned to major in computer science.

He graduated from Lawrence Technological University with a double major in math and computer science. He was hired by Electronic Data Systems as a systems engineer and has worked in the company's Troy, Warren and Southfield offices.

"I work in Southfield now. My particular job is developing and maintaining computer systems," said Trojanowski, who is single and lives in Farmington Hills. His alma mater, Lutheran High, has since moved to Rochester Hills.

He enjoys fencing and is involved with the fencing club at Schoolcraft College.

"My career is going the way I anticipated it would," he said. He still has his academic all-star certificate and the article that appeared in the newspaper announcing the team.

He is the son of Jerome and Diane Trojanowski of Farmington Hills.

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MIDORI HARRIS
Merry High School, Farmington Hills

Harris was a National Merit Scholarship finalist whose paternal grandfather paid the tuition for her to attend Mercy, an all-female, Catholic school.

In March 1990, she graduated from Michigan State University with a bachelor of science degree in biochemistry.

That year, she began a doctoral program in biochemistry, molecular and cell biology at Cornell University.

"I'm still here," she said from her home in Ithaca, New York. "I have one year left on the program. I did two semesters as a teaching assistant. Now I'm spending all my time doing research in the lab."

She works with yeast and her experiments center on genes involved in the process of DNA replication.

"Every time a cell appears to divide, it has to make another copy of DNA, exactly once and at the right time. The genes we work on we think are involved in some of that control — when to start the process."

Her future career plans including doing post doctoral research for up to five years. After that, she would like to teach.

"I'm not sure I want to run a lab like my professor does," she said. "I might teach at a small college."

Harris received a fellowship from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

Outside the laboratory, she likes to sing and is a member of the Cornell Choral Society. Her parents, Richard and JoAnn Harris, live in Detroit in the same house where Midori grew up.

Efforts to contact two academic all-stars or their family members from that first team were unsuccessful. They are Christopher Adamson, a Westland John Glenn graduate, and Tamara Christie, a Redford Union alumna.