

Wildwood Seniors Gain Financial Support to Keep Learning

WMHS seniors were presented with scholarship awards Monday morning.

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THE VILLAGES

Raven Muse has big aspirations after graduation.

The senior from Wildwood Middle High School says she wants to be a CEO of a major hospital.

And after Monday's scholarship presentations at the school gym, the soon-to-be graduate is one step closer to making her dream come true.

"I was only expecting to get two, but I'm not complaining!" said Muse after earning a total of six awards from groups like the Wildwood Rotary Club, First Christian Church ROMEOS and others.

The WMHS Class of 2017 received more than a quarter-million dollars in awards, including the state-sponsored Bright Futures Scholarships.

That's a lot of money for any college-bound students, let alone for a class of only about 70 kids.

"We are a small community around here, and it's hard to go from that to doing big things after we graduate," said senior Autumn Smith, who plans to attend Lake-Sumter State College before transferring to the University of Central Florida to study elementary education. "These people all really came together and gave us this huge opportunity."

Much of the support came from Villages residents and lifestyle groups, hoping to give the teens a head start in financing



Sophia Thornton, Lorin Reames, and Raven Muse received scholarships Monday at the Wildwood Middle High School Community Awards Ceremony.

their college educations.

They included groups like the African-American Club of The Villages, The Villages Apple User Group, Daughters of the American Revolution's John Bartram and Puc Puggy chapters, Dollars For Scholars, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1036 and others.

Friends of The Villages Library, a resident group of library supporters, not only presented \$10,000 in scholarship grants to WMHS students — they also funded the decorations and refreshments at the event.

Corky Eck, representing The Villages Vintage Car Club, said the project began years ago after he first approached the club with an idea to sponsor a

scholarship. To his surprise, other members stepped up with their checkbooks and cash in hand, raising more than \$2,000 at that meeting.

The Village of Sunset Pointe resident presented a scholarship to senior William Fowler, who plans on training to become a diesel mechanic in Jacksonville after high school.

WMHS Principal Richard Hampton said that from an educator's standpoint, this time of year is best described as "bittersweet."

It's exciting to see these students succeed, yet sad to see them go, he said.

WMHS seniors will conclude their time as Wildcats with a graduation ceremony scheduled for Friday evening.