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Two area seniors make commitment to teaching with Golden Apple scholarships

By ROB STROUD, Staff Writer

rstroud@jg-tc.com

High School seniors Jodie Latham and Jeana Wamsley have committed to teaching five years in an Illinois school with special needs after college.

This big commitment, part of winning full scholarships from the Golden Apple Foundation, does not faze the two young students.

“Anything in life you are going to have a big commitment to, so I might as well start while I am young,” said Wamsley, a Mattoon student. “I have had a couple of really good teachers in my life that made me feel really comfortable talking to them. I want to be that person who can do that for another.”

Latham, an Oakland student, said she appreciates that the Golden Apple Foundation’s rigorous training creates good teachers who can work with schools that have special needs. Latham said she likes this because, for her, teaching is “not just a job.”

“My teachers are really awesome teachers and they have inspired me to be a good teacher,” Latham said, adding she has life experiences that can help her relate to her students. “I just want to teach to help people.”

The Golden Apple Foundation provides financial assistance for four years to attend public or private universities, enrollment in summer programs that include teaching internships and enhanced teacher preparation, and continual mentoring by Golden Apple-winning teachers.

In exchange, the scholarship recipients must agree to teach for five years in an Illinois school that serves predominately low-income students or has below-par test scores.

Wamsley said the Golden Apple Foundation offers a good scholarship that enables her to give back through her teaching service after graduation.

“It was definitely a blessing to get the scholarship,” Latham said.

Latham plans to attend Blackburn College in Carlinville for an education in teaching math and English at the high school level. Wamsley plans to attend Illinois State University in Normal for an education in teaching reading, English and Spanish at the middle school level.

On the Facebook social networking Web site, Wamsley and Latham have been talking about their studies. Wamsley said she is looking forward to seeing someone she knows at the summer programs that are part of the scholarship program.

Latham was recommended to the Golden Apple Foundation by her English teacher, Lee Roll, and Wamsley was recommended by her English teacher, Amanda Bright.

Roll said the Golden Apple Foundation's rigorous application process, which includes seven essays, narrowed down a field of 1,850 applicants to 100 recipients in Illinois.

"That is pretty impressive," Roll said. "They really don't want anyone applying who is not serious so they make it extra hard."

Contact Rob Stroud at rstroud@jq-tc.com or 238-6861.