



Katie Lusk honored as Golden Apple Scholar

GHS senior one of just 100 in state

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GALESBURG — Forget the tradition of giving an apple to the teacher. One Illinois organization gives current and aspiring teachers a golden fruit, and a local student is among the honorees.

Since its beginnings in 1985, the Golden Apple Foundation has honored 230 outstanding teachers and has helped more than 1,000 achieve their dreams of becoming educators. A competitive program, the Golden Apple Scholar award is given to just over 100 students across the state yearly, many of whom hail from financially struggling or at-risk schools.

In exchange for full tuition compensation at one of the 53 participating Illinois institutions, Golden Apple Scholars must spend five years following college graduation teaching in a high-needs school somewhere in the state.

Katie Lusk, a senior at Galesburg High School, was recently named a Golden Apple Scholar, the first ever from Knox County, and will be inducted into the program at DePaul University in Chicago on Saturday.

After first being nominated by Janet Steckleberg, her child care and guidance teacher through the Galesburg Area Vocational Center, Lusk had to complete a lengthy application process before being one of the 250 selected for interviews at Eastern Illinois University. More than 1,400 Illinois high school students originally applied for the 125 spots.

"I couldn't even tell you one thing they asked me," she said of the interviews. Following her experience at EIU, Lusk waited for several days for a large envelope to arrive in her mailbox.

Staying at home with bronchitis gave her ample opportunity to await that envelope with the same anticipation other high school seniors have for college acceptance letters. "They told us the big packet was good," she stated. "(One day) I went and got the mail, and there was a huge packet. I was excited."

Lusk is a member of the GHS varsity tennis team, Artte Clubbe and is president of GHS Tomorrow's Teachers chapter. She also has given tennis lessons for the city of Galesburg for three years; something she says inspired her to become a teacher.

"I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. It's like being a mom without having kids of your own," she explained. "I like taking care of (children) and hearing about what they do and helping them become better people."

Her experiences working in Cynthia Barshinger's early childhood classroom at Bright Futures for her GAVC course solidified a desire to work with special education students. After graduation, Lusk will attend Western Illinois University to study special education.

Someday, she says, she wants to return to Galesburg to teach special needs students.

"I like the little jumpers and the teacher sweaters," Lusk said. "I'm excited for (teaching)."

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