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## OPRF's Megan White picked as Golden Apple

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March 26, 2009

By **CHRIS LAFORTUNE** [clafortune@pioneerlocal.com](mailto:clafortune@pioneerlocal.com)

Megan White's known for some time she wanted to be a teacher, but wasn't quite sure what she wanted to specialize in.

"I didn't know what grade, if I wanted to be a P.E. teacher," the Oak Park-River Forest High School senior said.

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**Oak Park-River Forest High School senior Megan White is a Golden Apple Scholar and works as a special-education intern. She often helps student Patrick O'Rourke in his second-period class.**  
*(Jon Langham/For Pioneer Press)*

Finally she settled on special education. She can thank her brother, Michael, for that.

"I'm his role model, and he's my inspiration," White said.

Michael White, 20, has Down syndrome. Megan White has spent much of her life helping take care of him.

"It's actually helped me in a lot of ways," White said. "It made me a more responsible person. It made me a very understanding, open-minded person."

It was partly this experience that led OPRF physics teacher Aaron Podolner to nominate White for the Golden Apple Scholar award. White is one of 100 student scholars selected by the organization this year.

Podolner, a Golden Apple teacher, said White is the first student he's nominated for the award. As a scholar, White will have to teach in a school of need for five years following graduation.

As a Golden Apple Scholar, White will receive a \$2,500 scholarship for her first two years of college. She'll also receive scholarship money her junior and senior years -- \$5,000 or \$10,000, depending on her major. Scholars also receive summer stipends and training, as well as mentoring from a Golden Apple teacher.

Following graduation, scholars for five years must teach in an Illinois school of need, which Golden Apple defines as a school that serves low-income students, or as a school with subpar test scores.

Podolner was sure she could handle that experience. "Some white kid, they may be well-meaning, but if they get in a class of black kids, they may not feel prepared or feel comfortable," Podolner said. "Whereas I just knew she would be comfortable in that environment."

White looks forward to the challenge. Golden Apple Scholars are asked to select five schools they'd like to teach at. She selected Clemente, Marshall and Lane Tech in Chicago, Morton East in Cicero and Morton West in Berwyn.

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"I like new challenges, because to me, you learn something new about you could never accomplish," White said.

White should make a fine teacher, OPRF special-needs instructor Mary Young said. Young has a long history with White, having taught her brother. The OPRF senior is also an on-campus intern for a period in White's special-education class. "I think she can just really kind of clue in to what these kids need," Young said. "She's a strong presence, yet she's not overbearing."

Aside from her involvement in Young's class through OPRF's Senior Instructional Leadership Corps, White is a member of OPRF's Best Buddies program, working with special-needs students. She's also on the high school's softball team.

Up to junior year she also played field hockey and basketball, but chose to concentrate on softball this year, hoping to be a walk-on in college.

She plans to attend Eastern Illinois University. The school is ranked first in the state for special education, she said.

Golden Apple will hold an induction ceremony for its scholars May 2.

White is the eighth OPRF student to win Golden Apple Scholar since 1999.

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