

Oak Lawn Community High School senior wins Golden Apple Scholar award

He comes from a family of scholars

By Janice Neumann | SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE
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Teachers have always been a big influence in Peter Buys' life. That's why the [Oak Lawn](#) Community High School senior wants to become one.

Buys—recently named a Golden Apple Scholar, one of 100 high school and college students in the state and among eight in the south suburbs—credits an Oak Lawn High School coach with showing him the joys of service work. He also can look at his own family members for inspiration.

The 18-year-old from Bridgeview becomes the fourth Oak Lawn High student in his family to receive the award, joining two sisters and a brother.

His sister Erika won the award in 2000 and now teaches theater and speech at the school. Sister Emily won in 2001 and teaches special education there. A brother, Daniel, won in 2006 and is a junior at North Central College in [Naperville](#), and plans to teach either history or social science at a Chicago school.

"I don't know if we can take credit for it. It must be something in the genes," said Theo Buys, father of the four children. He credits his wife, Annette, for staying home and helping the children with their studies when they were young.

Scholar winners are chosen for holding promise as future teachers, judging from their grades, test scores, extracurricular activities, essays and recommendations. The organization also annually awards 10 outstanding teachers.

Scholars agree to earn their bachelor's degrees at one of 53 participating Illinois universities, obtain Illinois teacher certification and teach for five years in an Illinois school of need, or one that has either poor test scores or many students from lower income families.

The designation brings with it tuition assistance of \$2,500 per year for the first

two years, then at least \$5,000 per year for the last two years. Scholars also receive a \$2,000 stipend for each summer they participate in an advanced teacher-preparation program held at [DePaul University](#) in Chicago.

Buys will attend Bradley University in Peoria in the fall to study music education.

"He's a young man who really has a concern for the community, which is one of the things we look for in potential scholars," said Jim Sorensen, director of the Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois program, referring to Buys' involvement in a student club that does fundraising and mission work for the underserved overseas.

Sorensen said several teachers at Oak Lawn High described Buys as creative, dedicated and a natural leader. Buys also is a member of the Senior Class Advisory Board and the Student Council, and vice president of the National Honor Society.

Other area winning scholars this year are: Valerie Oakey of Burbank (Reavis High School); Emily Contreras of Crest Hill ([Lockport](#) Township High); Malika Jackson of [Flossmoor](#) ([Homewood](#)-Flossmoor); Theresa Yerkes of Justice (Queen of Peace); Kevin Farrell of Lansing (Thornton Fractional South); Joseph Hruban of [Midlothian](#) (Bremen High); Alan Walnoha of [Oak Forest](#) (Oak Forest High); and Tiffany Ryan of [Sauk Village](#) (Bloom Trail High).