

Lilly scholarship winners surprise



(Photo: Louise Ronald/Palladium-Item)

Kiersten Merida was taken by surprise when her mother, guidance counselor and two of her teachers and a stranger entered the classroom where she was helping with after-school tutoring Thursday at Lincoln High School in Cambridge City.

The stranger stepped up and introduced herself.

Lisa Bates, program officer at the Wayne County Foundation, was there to tell Merida she will receive a Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship — four years of full tuition plus a \$900 annual stipend for required books and equipment.

"No way!" was Merida's first response before she began giving bubbly thanks to everyone gathered.

In contrast, the response of Kristen Kramer at Richmond High School, recipient of the other annual scholarship from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment, was subdued. When Bates told her she was a winner, Kramer said, "Really?"

"I've never heard you speechless," said RHS tennis coach Randy Hollingsworth, who wrote one of Kramer's letters of recommendations for the award.



"I'm just shocked," she said.

Kramer — known as Krissy to her classmates — plans to major in biology at Indiana University Bloomington, with the ultimate goal of becoming an orthodontist. She is the daughter of Anthony and Teresa Kramer.

Her older sister, Kaitlin Kramer, received the same scholarship last year, but that didn't work either for or against this year's recipient. The judges who rank the applicants never see names. "The entire process was blind," Bates said.

Teresa Kramer said she called Kaitlin to tell her the news about her sister's scholarship. "I can't believe it!" mom reported Kaitlin as saying. "That's so awesome!"

Her father teased Kristen for being so quiet when she got the news. "Your sister like hyperventilated," he said.

Everyone around her urged Kramer to say something.

"Thank you," was what she came up with. "I am super surprised. I was blindsided by this. Completely."

Merida needed no urging to talk but her sentiments were similar.

"I really didn't think I was ever going to win this," she said.

Merida plans to study pharmacy at Purdue University, where her older brother and sister already are enrolled. She is the daughter of Derek and Nanette Merida.

Nanette Merida said the scholarship will offer "a little bit of relief. ... Three kids in college next year!"

Both Kramer and Merida maintained perfect 4.0 grade point averages in high school.

Kramer has been a member of student council, captain of the varsity tennis team and president of the National Honor Society. She participates in academic team competitions, serves on the Mayor's Youth Council and volunteers at her church and as a credit recovery tutor at school.

Merida has been a member of the National Honor Society, Key Club, Lincoln Teens, student council and Spanish Club. She is on the varsity tennis team and served as captain of the varsity volleyball team and president of the Business Professionals of America. She also volunteers at her church and as a teacher's assistant.

Since 1998, 39 students have been awarded Lilly Endowment Community Scholarships through the Wayne County Foundation. Merida and Kramer were selected from a pool of 41 applicants.

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