

VINEYARD GAZETTE

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Scholarship Funds Offer Class of 2000 Cornucopia of Aid

By CHRIS BURRELL

There's a money pot on this Island worth millions of dollars, and you don't need to enter a game show to dip into it.

You do need to have dreams of being a scientist, a chef, a teacher or just someone with a thirst for learning. Mostly, you have to be a high school senior with your life stretched out before you like the ocean off the south shore.

More often than not, the first step for seniors with such dreams carries a high price-tag - a college education. Fortunately for them, they live on an Island where fire departments, police officers, churches and a host of other benefactors are intent on giving them a serious boost.

Last year, seniors at the high school were awarded scholarships worth more than \$400,000, much of that simply the interest that's accrued on endowments that reach into the millions.

The deadline for applying for this year's slew of 76 separate scholarships is this Wednesday, and seniors already flagging from a winter of college applications and financial aid forms are waking up to a new battery of forms and another batch of essays to write, all aimed at getting a share of the bounty.

"I put it off until this week, but I actually have gotten most of it done," said Elizabeth Phelps of West Tisbury, who is hoping for admission to Wellesley or Smith. "I feel like I need to get the scholarships, because I don't know how the financial aid will come out."

With college costs ranging from \$10,000 to \$30,000 a year, depending on whether it's the private or public route, students and their parents are eager and grateful for the promise of help.

"I know someone who got a lot of scholarship money from last year," said Miss Phelps. "Our teacher told us she has to pay some incredibly low price for college, like \$200 a year. That really amazed a lot of people."

Colleges actually vary in how they treat scholarship money, some preferring to reduce a student's borrowing by deducting the award from the loan amount in a financial aid package. Others simply subtract a portion of the scholarship from the grant they were planning to offer a student anyway.

That practice is called "displacement," and Jack Ware, who helps administer local scholarships through the Permanent Endowment Fund, frowns on any formula that takes money away from where the donor intended it to go.

"The scholarship is meant to help the student, not to help the university," he said.

Still, students who have departed the Island laden with scholarship awards aren't complaining. Any money has been a help, and for some, it's been an absolute necessity.

A case in point is Conamore Wibel of Tisbury, who graduated in 1998 with \$6,000 in scholarships. Without the money, she said, there was no way she and her family could have afforded Pratt Institute in New York city, even with the financial aid the school offered.

Miss Wibel knew she needed to access the local scholarship funds, so she put extra effort into her applications.

"What helped me get scholarships was that I sent away part of my portfolio. I just tried to overdo my application," she said.

Miss Wibel has not wasted the opportunity afforded her by her Island benefactors. She did one year at Pratt and then managed to parlay her talent into a coveted situation - admission to Cooper Union in New York, where students receive free tuition. Island scholarships worth \$3,000 have carried into her second year, helping to offset the cost of living in the city and price of supplies as she pursues a degree in architecture.

"It's so crucial to me," she said. "I'm so incredibly grateful to these wonderful sources that help us kids from the Vineyard."

While it dawns on the young recipients how fortunate they are, experienced educators in the area are staggered at the level of support available here.

"It's incredible," said high school guidance director Michael McCarthy. "I came from a school where we gave out like \$20,000, and we thought it was a lot. I came here, and the community support is unbelievable."

The support comes from local organizations devoted to raising funds for scholarships and not afraid to get dirty doing it.

The Portuguese American Club cooks up an entire feast of soups, stews and bread in the effort.

And for as long as Manuel (Manny) Estrella IV can remember, raising money for scholarships has been the guiding activity of the West Tisbury Firemen's Association. Every summer at the fair, you can find the firefighters grilling hamburgers and pouring sodas for the cause.

It's remarkable how much leverage burgers and Coke can muster; whatever cash they earn in August goes out the next May as scholarship checks. Last year, the fire department sent \$12,000 off with seniors and even some adults in continuing education, said Mr. Estrella.

There are as many stories as there are scholarships. Philanthropists such as Elmer Hobson Deloura of Edgartown grew up here, made their fortunes on the mainland and then chose to endow funds to benefit the Vineyard's young people.

But a large portion of the scholarships are memorials to Vineyarders. Miss Wibel had won a scholarship in memory of Gretchen Manter, who died at the age of 22. Gretchen's sister, Melissa Manter, remembered her as a "free spirit" whose friends got together and established a fund in her memory.

These memorials offer people a way to keep a person's memory alive and help others along the way.

It works that way for Gayle Mone and her husband, Robert, who select the recipient of a scholarship in memory of their son, Ryan, who died in a car accident in 1998. Mrs. Mone said the varsity hockey team at the high school offered to sponsor a scholarship in Ryan's name and let them select the senior hockey player.

"Ryan was an important part of their team," said Mrs. Mone. "It's just wonderful to have him remembered. It's very special to us. He thrived there and started skating when he was a house Mite."

The scholarship symbolizes the kind of support that exists here, she said.

"The Island is like a family," she said. "That's what happens in a place like this. You're not isolated at all."