

Incentive program brings four teens to Aquinas

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — For England Whipset, his adaptation to a new school environment begins before he even leaves his house.

"I don't think I ever dressed up to go to school before," England remarked as he looked down at his dress shirt, slacks and tie.

On the other hand, Kenneth Davis seems to enjoy his new high school's dress code.

"I think it's neat," he commented.

Both England and Kenneth are settling into high-school life at Aquinas Institute, 1127 Dewey Ave. And although they may have the same outward appearance as many other freshmen, they do hold a unique distinction.

England and Kenneth, along with two other students — Vantha Phouk and Katherine Hizer — are the first to attend Aquinas as part of the Work-Scholarship Connection program. Last year all four attended Jefferson Middle School in the Rochester City School District.

The Work-Scholarship Connection was begun in 1987 by Aquinas alumnus Robert Wegman, chairman and chief executive officer of Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., in response to a challenge by the Urban League of Rochester to address attrition problems in the City School District.

Under the Work-Scholarship Connection,



Provided photo

Former Jefferson Middle School students (from left) Kenneth Davis, England Whipset, Katherine Hizer and Vantha Phouk are the first Work-Scholarship Connection youths to attend Aquinas Institute.

Participants are offered jobs and scholarships as incentives to stay in school and attain good grades. In addition to guiding these students toward graduation, another of the program's goals is to instill in teens the motivation to attend college or seek long-term employment utilizing their talents.

Throughout the school year, mentors

are available to chart students' progress. A typical youth in this program has adequate academic capabilities, but external situations in his or her home life — such as crime or poverty — may threaten the desire to attain a high-school diploma.

Although the Work-Scholarship Connection now involves more than 400 students and 40 companies, Aquinas is the

first private institution to incorporate the program. England, Kenneth, Vantha and Katherine were all required to pass an application test to be accepted into Aquinas.

"Hopefully they will be successful and others will follow," said Patrick Hanley, Aquinas' new president.

Hanley emphasized that while the Work-Scholarship Connection students do receive financial and academic support, they are still expected to meet the same standards all other Aquinas students must achieve.

"It is not a two-tiered system," Hanley said. "The students have the ability, and they'll be asked to work on that ability."

So far, the former Jefferson Middle School teenagers seem to be enjoying their Aquinas experience — including their involvement in the school's athletic programs. Kenneth is playing freshman football, while England plans to get involved in boxing and Vantha is leaning toward basketball. (Katherine was ill last week and was expected to begin attending classes this week.)

Vantha noted that many members of the Aquinas student body are helping his adjustment process as well.

"I was sitting at Mass alone the other day, and a kid introduced himself to me," he said.

Extra Credit!

Colleen Ryan, a senior at Nazareth College of Rochester, has been named a recipient of a Gold Key Award by Omicron Delta Epsilon, an international honor society in economics.

Colleen, who carries a 3.85 grade-point average, is one of only five national recipients.

Anthony J. Tubiolo, a parishioner at St. Rita's Church, Webster, has been awarded a Knights of Columbus scholarship to attend St. Bonaventure University.

Anthony is a 1995 Webster High School graduate. His award was based on a written essay submission as well as community involvement.

Kids Answer

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"Love your enemies and do good to them."

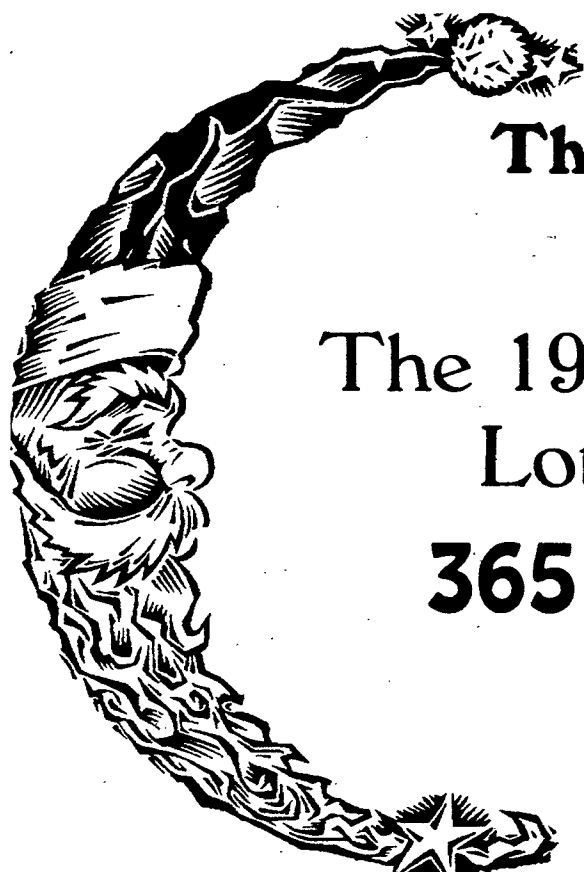
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