

Class of '96

Heads of the class



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varsity club and National Honor Society. He also serves on the Community Advisory Board at the Geneva Day Treatment Center, and is a eucharistic minister at St. Stephen's Church in Geneva.

"It's better to have a well-rounded package. If you just keep your head in the books, you're not going to have friends. You need to get involved, or your life is just going to be boring," said Sean, 17. He will enter the pre-medicine program at the University of Notre Dame this fall.

Jaime Hilliard and Gretchen Strieter also believe there's more to life than just studying.

"It's important that you can relate with people. Working with people is the most important part of most jobs, unless you're in a computer room alone or something," said Jaime, 17, who finished No. 1 in her class at Nazareth Academy. She will attend Coastal Carolina University this fall to study marine biology.

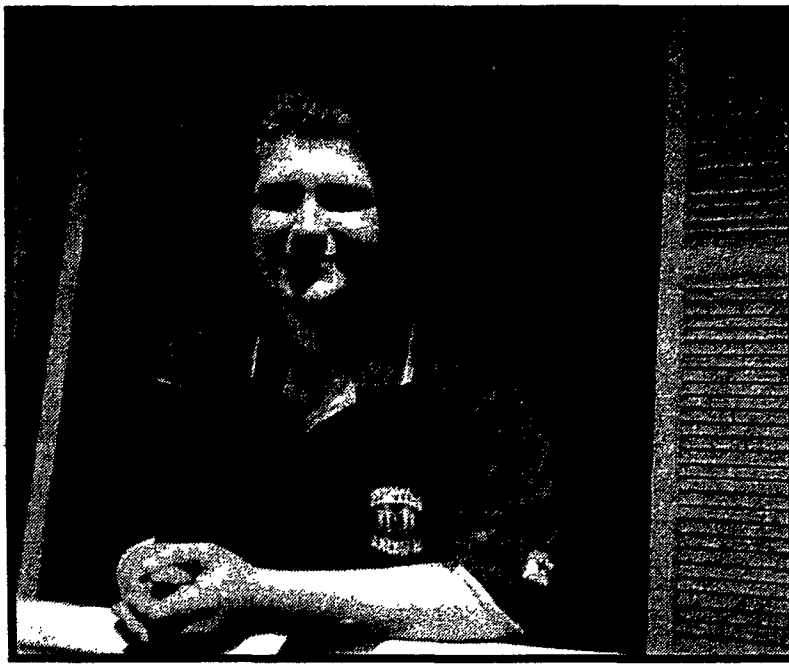
"In the big scheme of things, class rank doesn't matter. It's important to have a life," added Gretchen, 17, the valedictorian at Bishop Kearney High School. She will major in biology at Cornell University beginning this fall.

At the same time, these gifted graduates would never downplay the virtues of studying hard.

"I've always thought that doing well in school is a key to your future. It's useless to do something and not try to do it well," said Rebecca Tinio, 16, the valedictorian at Our Lady of Mercy High School. She is headed for Harvard University in the fall.

These efforts can pay off by making a student's choice of college possible, and affordable. Such is the case with Mike Lynch, who finished No. 1 in his class at McQuaid Jesuit.

Mike said he doesn't make a big deal over being the top senior, but added that he's "happy it happened to be that way. It's helped with scholarships." He will attend Washington University in St.



Mike Latona Sean O'Donnell, the valedictorian at Geneva DeSales High School, is headed for the University of Notre Dame this fall.

Louis, Mo., with a concentration in biological science and engineering.

Dedication to good grades has also paid off big for Katie Dougherty and Steve Kushner, this year's co-valedictorians at Aquinas Institute.

Katie, 18, has already been accepted into Albany Medical College after she completes four years in a biology program at Siena College. Steve, also 18, has earned a spot in the University of Michigan School of Architecture after he finishes his sophomore year of college. In both cases, acceptance into these programs is limited to a small handful of students straight out of high school.

While the short-term futures of Katie and Steve seem certain, Rebecca — who has not yet declared a major at Harvard — pointed out that you don't have to make a career choice in order to begin college.

"I've just got to keep an open mind and see if anything catches me," Rebecca said.

Kathleen from Elmira also favors this unrestricted approach. She plans to continue her equestrian career after she begins college, and has only recently begun considering a major in psychology.

"I took a psychology class this year and loved it. I thought it was really interesting," she said.

Sean from Geneva said he would like to study pathology at the University of Notre Dame, but has also thought about computer programming and other areas of science.

Even Katie from Aquinas, with several years of medical studies awaiting her, isn't so sure she won't have a change of heart somewhere up the road.

"Everyone should have goals. But they shouldn't be saying, 'This is what I'm going to do with my life,'" Katie commented.

Her co-valedictorian shares that viewpoint.

"God gives you many talents, and you can discover talents eventually," Steve said.

Whatever the profession, Katie pointed out that love of one's work should be the top priority in any career choice.

"I've always been interested in helping others. It doesn't have anything to do with the money I make," Katie said.

Again, Steve agreed.

"My success is measured by how happy I am, not by how much money I make or who I answer to," he said.

"I won't make any of those decisions based on prestige," Mike from McQuaid Jesuit noted.

"You just have to be who you are and happy with what you do," Kathleen in Elmira said.

Gretchen at Bishop Kearney said it's important to use her potential, but that she also wants "to love what I do." She plans to heed some advice she recently received from her father.

"He said, 'Find a job you love, and you'll never have to work a day in your life,'" Gretchen said.

EDITORS' NOTE: "Heads of the Class" is running in place of our regular "On the Move" feature this week. Next week's "On the Move," which will focus on junior high Catholics, will appear in its regular place — the centerfold of the Catholic Courier.

Graduation should be the best of times, not the worst ...

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