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MCHS sophomore chosen for Gatton Academy

By Bobbie Hayse Messenger-Inquirer
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Liz Burgan

Jack Smith, a sophomore at McLean County High School, is among three regional students who have been accepted into the Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science, which is on Western Kentucky University's campus in Bowling Green.

The academy is a STEM-based living and learning experience for students in their junior and senior years of high school. Students live in WKU's Florence Schneider Hall and attend college classes.

Smith, 15, who is the son of Jacquelyn Smith, said he liked the potential for the higher level of classes offered at Gatton, which is why he applied. There are a lot of opportunities at Gatton that aren't offered at traditional high schools, he said.

"It's a unique experience, and it's something I definitely wanted," he said.

He was excited when he learned of his acceptance into the prestigious school, but he is also somewhat nervous. This will be the first time he will be leaving home for an extended period of time, and leaving behind his family will take some getting used to, he said.

Smith wants to become an astronaut someday, and hopes to pursue classes that help along that journey.

Along with Smith, Liz Burgan, a 15-year-old student at Daviess County High School, and Nolan French, a 16-year-old Hancock County High School student, have been chosen for Gatton.

Burgan, 15, is a student at Daviess County High School and is the daughter of Richard and Amy Burgan. French, 16, is a Hancock County High School student and the son of Crystal and Bryan Bell and Jared and Amber French.

When she found she was accepted to Gatton, Burgan said she was on her way to the library. She squealed in the car, and her dad immediately turned the car around so they could head home to celebrate with her mom.

Burgan wanted to attend Gatton because she has had the opportunity to take some tougher classes at DCHS, and she liked the idea of increasing that rigor at the academy.



Jack Smith



Nolan French

“I’ve enjoyed the challenge, and I knew Gatton could continue to provide challenging classes,” she said.

She has an interest in life science, and plans to pursue classes to help her obtain a degree in medicine.

French said the process for getting into Gatton was stressful, so he was relieved to find out he was accepted. He was shocked at first, but said he is excited about residential living on a college campus.

“The idea of being in that kind of community and surrounded by other students, and taking college classes, and having that kind of independence was a big thing that appealed to me,” he said.

He has a lot of interests, and hopes to pursue many of them while attending both Gatton and WKU, particularly computer science and psychology.

According to the academy, approximately 95 students are accepted each year. More than 350 students begin the application, with more than 250 students completing the process. To be eligible to apply, students have to be a sophomore or a junior, have to have completed geometry and algebra II before enrollment, score a minimum ACT math score of 22 and a minimum SAT math score of 540, and submit all required materials, like a transcript, letters of recommendation, and more.

Bobbie Hayse, bhayse@messenger-inquirer.com, 270-691-7315

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