

IDAHO SCHOLAR IS HEADED FOR GEORGETOWN

David Woolsey

Centennial senior wins \$2,000 award for college-bound black students

Centennial High School senior John Jackson hasn't really thought a lot about race during his school days science, soccer and his social life were more pressing concerns.

But cultural heritage is important in his life: His father is black, his mother is Asian.

This year, his background combined with his studies have made him one of the nation's 600 winners in the National Achievement Scholarship Program. The program is an annual academic competition for college-bound black students sponsored by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

He is Idaho's only winner of the \$2,000 one-time scholarship. James Davis of Mountain Home High School was named an honorary achievement scholar.

Jackson, who will attend Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., this fall, smiles when you ask him about Centennial's demographics: virtually all white.

"I never really had black friends at school just friends," he says. "A person's race is not something I think about."

The 17-year-old has lived in Idaho for 13 years. Despite the state's small minority population, Jackson says Idahoans have been warm to him.

"People aren't really biased in Idaho," he says thoughtfully. "They don't look down on you in school or anything."

The downside is that Idaho and its schools don't provide many opportunities for Jackson to explore his cultural history.

His parents take him to cultural events such as plays and NAACP activities when they're traveling, he said. He also gets to interact with relatives and friends on visits.

Jackson has followed his older brother's footsteps through Meridian schools and to college. Paul Jackson, a government major at Georgetown, will graduate in May.

"The teachers have always had high expectations for me because they had my brother four years before me," he remembers. "They expected the same of me."

But the younger brother's interest is biology, with a potential move into medicine.

"My mother's happy," John Jackson says. "If everything goes well, we may have a lawyer and a doctor in the family."

His father, Bill, works for Morrison Knudsen. His mother, Jacqueline, works for Beacon Light Products. John has done some summer construction jobs and plans to work again this summer to help pay for college.

But despite his plans for a top-quality college education, he says there's more to life than academics.

"I've never tried to live my life as an honor student," says the three-year member of the National Honor Society, who usually falls a B short of straight-A's each semester. "I try to just go with the flow."

Soccer posters dominate the walls of his room, along with trophies and ribbons he's won from his success on the field. He has a prized collection of Georgetown memorabilia from his brother. And a note by his door he sees every time he leaves his room reminds: "Be nice to people."

The affable teen-ager grins when asked if he really needs the prodding.

"Sometimes," he answers.

Jackson and his parents are footing most of the \$23,000-a-year bill for Georgetown. He didn't seek out the scholarship; he was automatically entered when he took the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test.

Actually, the scholarship is one of the few school events that has singled Jackson out for his race. And he's not entirely comfortable about the award.

"Blacks may not have the same opportunities as a lot of whites for scholarships, and it's good that they're giving a chance to showcase excellent black students," he says. "But I don't want any kind of special treatment because I'm black."

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GOOD NEWS ABOUT A GOOD KID

Our View

John Jackson one of Idaho's many hard-working teens

In some ways, there are lots of John Jacksons out there good, smart, hard-working teen-agers with a bright future.

In other ways, John Jackson stands alone. With a black father and Asian mother, his heritage makes him special. And so do his grades.

The two combined earned Jackson a \$2,000 scholarship in the National Achievement Scholarship Program.

Congratulations, John.

And thanks for reminding us that Idaho is full of wonderful kids with good heads on their shoulders.

Jackson, a Centennial High School senior, plans to attend Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., in the fall to study biology, maybe medicine. His older brother will graduate from Georgetown in May.

It's so nice to be able to focus for a moment on such achievements and to ponder the joy and success the kids of Bill and Jacqueline Jackson are sure to have.

Too often we are caught up in the woeful tales of misguided youths facing futures of poverty and incarceration. Most of them will be supported by taxpayers all their lives and contribute little if anything to society.

Fortunately, the troublemakers are vastly outnumbered by those among us who face life, as Jackson does, with a little sign by the door reminding them to “be nice to people.”

Words to live by.

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