

Scholarships Help Pave Way for Grads



Scott Levine/Clinton Herald - Clinton High School seniors (front) McKenzley Morris; (back row, from left) Rachelle Susie, Keaton Stoll, Dylan Cottrell and Lane Boisen take a look at the scholarships page on the Clinton School District website. All five students joined dozens of others at Clinton High School this past year in applying for scholarships.

CLINTON — Being ordinary wasn't going to make the cut for Dylan Cottrell and Lane Boisen.

The soon-to-be Clinton High School graduates desired an opportunity to attend post-secondary schooling for free. Their fate didn't rest on a group of educators judging a hard-copy application.

Their full-ride video scholarship application to Midwest Technical Institute was broadcast on social media for the world to decide. During Clinton High School's convocation ceremony Wednesday, Cottrell and Boisen will be recognized along with dozens of other students with similar journeys to earning money to attend post-secondary schooling.

It's all part of the growing effort to secure as much funding as possible to afford education after high school, Clinton High School Guidance Counselor Department Chairwoman Sue Schrader said.

"Even if it's a \$200 scholarship, that will pay for a couple of books," Schrader said. "That's how important these are."

Although not every student seeks scholarships, the participation rate is on the rise, Schrader said. That coincides with the escalation of tuition costs. According to the College Board, tuition and fees for the 2015-16 school year was \$32,405 for private colleges, \$9,410 for state residents at public colleges and \$23,893 for out-of-state residents attending public universities.

Ten years ago, those costs were 20 to 30 percent cheaper, according to the College Board.

While many will see athletes and students walk across the stage Wednesday at Clinton High School to earn that money, they didn't see the work that went into winning the highly competitive process of achieving those accolades.

For Cottrell and Boisen, it was through a video, highlighting their welding skills and making it as personal as possible.

"You could tell who took their time with their video," Cottrell said. "I wanted to make it as personal and heartfelt as possible."

It paid off. Cottrell and Boisen were two of seven winners of the annual scholarship for the nine-month advanced pipe fitting program at MTI in Moline, Illinois. Michelle Fossett, with MTI, said more than 200 people registered for the scholarship, with 96 completing the application process.

Cottrell and Boisen are the only winners from Clinton High School in the four years the award has been offered.

Boisen just recently took up welding after joining in the building trades program at Clinton High School. He enjoys the profession so much, he regularly welds hours a day after working and going to class.

"I started doing it and I realized this is what I wanted to do for a living," Boisen said. "I just started welding after class for five to six hours. I welded as much as I could."

Clinton High School seniors like Rachelle Susie, McKenzley Morris and Keaton Stoll participated in the more traditional route of filling out scholarships. All three will be recognized Wednesday to help further their educational goals.

What they found during the process was that it was a year-long senior project.

"I worked on them for probably two to three days a week," said Stoll, who started the process in mid-fall and will attend Iowa State University next fall. "Some of the questions they asked on the forms I wasn't expecting them to ask. It was tough to find a good answer."

Schrader and the rest of the guidance counselor staff meet with students throughout their high school careers. During junior year, though, they begin to talk about applying for scholarships.

Once senior year starts, Schrader sees a handful of students applying for scholarships. By the spring, about 25 to 30 percent of students work on local scholarships through the CHS guidance counselor's office.

That number doesn't include students who have applied for aid through their respective colleges.

"Any money received for college is really helpful," said Susie, who plans on attending Kirkwood Community College in the fall. "When you get to be a senior, you should work on scholarships as soon as you can. Time flies by."

Clinton High School seniors are starting to take that message to heart. Money distributed to recent classes has increased.

The class of 2015 was awarded a total of \$559,699 from out-of-area and local scholarships. That was more than the class of 2014, which earned \$394,862.

"I'm going to private college, so I couldn't take a break," said Morris, who plans to major in secondary education at Augustana College. "I needed all the help I could get."

Navigating through the scholarships are a bit different than in the past. Online applications are available for several awards and some schools allow students to fill out one application to be used toward multiple, different scholarship opportunities.

Once reference letters are written and the essay portion is completed, the students and Schrader agree, the process eases up a bit.

"It's gotten easier because of technology," Schrader said. "Certainly the list of scholarships have grown over the years, which is nice for our students. It's a great opportunity."

Despite the changes and the increase in technology, the students referenced one main component to earning scholarships — volunteering.

"When I look back at the scholarships, getting good grades is fantastic," Cottrell said. "Being involved is a big deal, too. It's easier for future students since they're making it a graduation requirement. It's nice to put on a resume, so I would encourage people to do as much extra stuff as they can."

The convocation is set for 6 p.m. Wednesday at Clinton High School.

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