

7 graduating seniors recognized

BY MICHAEL J. BILLONI
Rotary Club of Grand Island

Seven graduating seniors from Grand Island High School were recognized by the Rotary Club of Grand Island during its 54th annual scholarship presentation at its virtual meeting Wednesday. Students were judged by their scholarship records along with community service during their high school careers.

Mary Haggerty, a member of the Rotary Club's board of directors and the recently retired principal at the William Kaegebein Elementary School, chaired the selection committee and said they reviewed 18 applicants before selecting three to receive \$1,000 scholarships each with four others named service honorees.

"We were so impressed with the caliber of these students who exhibited such commitments to their community and school. Each of them truly follows the Rotary motto of 'Service Above Self,'" Haggerty said. She said the seven students totaled more than 5,000 hours of community service. In the past, the Rotary Club would award two scholarships, but since three students were so close, the club presented a third financial award.

The scholarship recipients were Luke Hess, Emily Phillips and Sean Christian Rustowicz. The service honorees were Matthew Aronica, Gabby Bergstrom, Zoe Coutu and Ben Spiesz.

The Rotary Club's scholarship tradition began with the high school's first senior class graduation in 1966, and since then more than 140 scholarships have been awarded.

Hess, who graduates third in his class of 224 students, was the president of the school's DECA program and co-president of the Rotary Club's Inter-Act program this year. In addition to his academic and extracurricular achievement, he spends time volunteering in the community. He spearheaded his own "Raising for the Rescues," an initiative to help the SPCA, and he is an avid supporter of Young Life on Grand Island and a Trinity Church branch program leader. He and Bergstrom were co-founders of Casey's Cabana, a waterfront summertime restaurant on the Island.



Luke Hess

Phillips, who describes herself as "driven to serve" from a young age, is most proud about helping to start "Cooking for Cancer" when she was 7 years old. The initiative has raised more than \$50,000. She also volunteers for health care facilities, youth church events, playing softball with the disabled and attending mission trips.



Emily Phillips

Rustowicz, a three-time recipient of the Pride of the Island award, the H Pin and the President's Award in both elementary and middle school, was the senior class president, SAAD president and student council treasurer.

An accomplished scholar athlete and an active member of Young Life, he has been volunteering throughout the community for many years. He has been involved with the Parish Players theatre group and last summer was involved with the Rockin' the Grounds fundraiser at his church. He is a youth soccer coach, volunteers with the Miracle League and helped coach the Unified basketball team at school.

"Our parents taught us to always put others ahead of ourselves," the youngest of six children told Rotary members during the meeting.

Aronica, an accomplished scholar athlete credits the youth ministry organization, Young Life, for changing his outlook as a high school student.



Matthew Aronica

Young Life gave him a tremendous opportunity to get more involved with community programs and projects in his church.

Bergstrom, a young lady who loves life, loves being an active member of her community. An entrepreneur, she strives to make decisions that benefit the entire community and those in need. She is the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce Youth Ambassador and strives to bridge the gap between students and Island business owners. She has taken

multiple trips to Haiti and the Dominican Republic to serve communities in need. She is extremely proud of the success of Casey's Cabana and how they can put fellow students to work over the summer.

Zoe Coutu is dedicated to community service through her work with the Girl Scouts and Cradle Beach and plans to continue her dedication to community service, both in college and in her future career. She has been an active Girl School since youth and plans to continue assisting with that program because of what it has allowed her to become as a well-balanced young lady.



Gabby Bergstrom

When Spiesz began high school, the talented athlete credits the opportunity he had to host games at his church for middle school students that gave him a tremendous job that soon became a passion to become the best voice he could be in the lives of these students. He was such an inspiration to the younger students that he was asked to speak to his peers, which he accomplished. Through his work at church he became involved with other community activities and as a senior he was an active member of DECA.

(Photos courtesy of Grand Island High School)



Zoe Coutu

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(Photos courtesy of Grand Island High School)

IN THE NEWS

Free food drive-thru at Trinity Church
Trinity United Methodist Church has announced the first of a series of monthly food giveaways.

Trinity UMC, located at 2100 Whitehaven Road, will host a drive-thru food pantry every fourth Saturday this summer starting June 27. The drive-thru will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

First come, quantities limited. Healthy food options will be available. Social distancing protocols will be in place. Walk-up patrons will be permitted.

For more information, call 773-3322 or email gitrinitymissions@gmail.com.

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