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## **Girl has 20,000 reasons to dream bigger**

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Samantha Feemster was planning on attending University of Alaska Fairbanks next year.

Now she's thinking of applying to Baylor, a private research college in Texas.

The Seward High School senior has more options, thanks to a \$20,000 Horatio Alger Scholarship.

Over 35,000 students applied for the 2009 national award. Feemster was the only Alaskan recognized.

"I didn't have much hope initially," she said. "I thought, hmmm, I'm probably not going to get it."

Nevertheless, she filled out the application, wrote three essays and sent everything in.

That kind of gung-ho attitude is what the Horatio Algiers Association looks for in scholarship recipients, according to spokeswoman Carrie Blewitt.

The association, named after 19th-century writer Horatio Alger Jr., rewards students who overcome adversity through perseverance.

Scholarship criteria includes integrity, grade point average and financial obstacles.

"It's very competitive," Blewitt said. "These are pretty remarkable kids."

The predominant selection factor is how well a student has overcome hurdles in life.

According to Blewitt, many scholarship recipients have experienced homelessness, abuse, parents with drug or alcohol problems or financial hardships. The average yearly income for this year's applicants was just over \$10,000 for a family of three.

Feemster admitted that she's faced obstacles in her life. There have been family problems, a move from Texas and financial difficulties living with her single-parent mother.

"My mom doesn't make very much money," she said matter-of-factly. "It doesn't really bother me. It's kind of an unspoken knowledge, but I don't get treated differently."

Neither, she was quick to add, does she run around in "rag-tag" clothes.

"I have a lot of family," she said. "They help out when they can."

Feemster, who carries a 3.8 grade point average, heard about the scholarship offer through Upward Bound coordinator Lori Krier.

The program, geared toward students who plan on being first-generation college graduates, offers support and financial aid opportunities.

"Samantha is a wonderful young woman who has wonderful goals and morals," Krier said. "She's the epitome of what you'd want in a student. She's a leader, she's an A student and she's overcome some adversity in her young life."

Horatio Alger scholarship recipients are "the cream of the crop" of students, according to Blewitt. They're well-rounded, well-adjusted and active in their communities and schools.

Feemster was a member of her high school ski and track teams and co-captain of this year's cross-country team. She is also student government treasurer.

"Samantha is an intelligent athlete with a good heart," Seward High School principal Ginger Blackmon said. "She does a good job juggling her school, sports and home responsibilities. She's a pleasure to have around."

Feemster hopes to study biology or chemistry, continue on through graduate school and possibly even higher, possibly even a Ph.D.

Without the Horatio Alger scholarship, she would have still attended college but only with the help of student loans.

"I've heard so many horror stories of taking years and years to pay them off," she said. "I'm so, so grateful I won't have to do that now."

Feemster is also a recipient of the University of Alaska Scholars scholarship and expects additional merit-based scholarships are headed her way.

For one of her scholarship application essays, she had to compare herself to a member of the Horatio Alger Association. She chose Mayla Angelou.

"It was her stubbornness that attracted me, her keep-on-trucking attitude," she said. "I kind of do that too."

Feemster plans on working for one of the local tour companies through the summer before heading off to whatever college she chooses. She wants to take advantage of Seward's wildlife and beauty for as long as she can.

"I know it might take away some of the glamour to see a whale for the 20th time," she said. "It might take away some of the mystique."

She paused for a moment.

"But then again, it probably won't."