

\$2,500 Horatio Alger Scholarship

By MEGAN MIDDLETON
Staff Writer

Seventeen-year-old Jonathan Brown had to catch his breath the moment he learned he was the recipient of a Horatio Alger scholarship.

The John Tyler High School senior was busy reading a book for English — and had just gotten to the good part — when his mother urged him to look inside the big envelope that came in the mail.

Inside was a letter that informed him he was one of 112 students in the state to win the \$2,500 scholarship.

"I was so excited," Brown said. "It was the first scholarship I had actually won."

But winning the scholarship was not only the result of Brown being able to demonstrate his academic prowess. To qualify, students must also show how they have overcome adversity.

"It taught me that the academics for me, was a way out of poverty. If I want to get somewhere, I've got to be educated."

— Jonathan Brown

And what most people don't know about this humble, well-spoken teenager is that for years he and his family were virtually homeless — living in a shelter and with family and church members, he said.

And while the \$2,500 scholarship may put only a dent in college tuition and fees, Brown is thankful for it, and

knows that every little bit will help make it easier for him to pay for college.

Receiving the scholarship, to him, means "an opportunity to get a higher education." Not having a home, he said, has taught him to be grateful for what he has and be resourceful. It also taught him another important lesson.

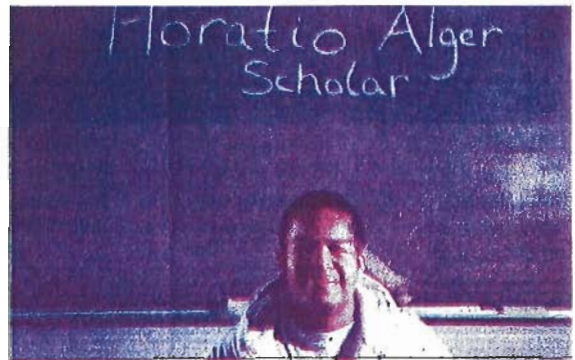
"It taught me that the academics, for me, was a way out of poverty," he said. "If I want to get somewhere, I've got to be educated."

LIFE LESSONS

Looking back now, Brown said the experience of being homeless has made him humble and more mature.

When he was in the sixth grade, he said, his family was kicked out of their house.

In the years following, they moved from place to place, staying with family. See SCHOLAR, Page 7C



— Staff Photo By Amy Peters
PROUD MOMENT: Jonathan Brown, a senior at John Tyler High School, was recently awarded the Horatio Alger Scholarship.

SCHOLAR Continued From 1C

ily members, church members. For a 90-day period, they stayed at the shelter of the Salvation Army.

"It was the worst thing possible," he said. "I never thought it would actually happen to me."

Growing up, Brown said, he thought maybe he would just go and work at a restaurant.

But he said that in the seventh grade, his math teacher noticed his academic talent and encouraged him to strive for higher goals.

"She inspired me to take Pre-AP classes," he said. "She was like, 'it doesn't matter what you have — you can have all the material things that you want, but what you have in your mind, no one can take away from you.'"

Once in high school, another teacher encouraged him to take International Baccalaureate classes.

And even when it came to applying for the Horatio Alger scholarship, it was the nudging of a teacher that kept him from giving up.

"She told me, she said, 'It's not like you to give up on a scholarship,'" he recalled. "She said ... 'Just apply for it,' and when she said that, I actually applied for it that very day. I really, honestly, didn't think I was going to get it."

The role teachers have played in his life seems to have given him a greater appreciation for what they do.

"When I grew up, I usually thought of teachers as those people who grade the papers," he said. "But I came to see teachers as people ... they actually are real people. They actually help you as much as they can, as long as you try to help yourself and better yourself."

His mother has also been a source of inspiration and encouragement.

Jonathan's mom, Cricket L. Brown, said she is proud of her son for winning this scholarship and prays that more will come because she cannot afford to pay for his education.

And she wants to see him go to college.

"I hope he gets all the education he can," Ms. Brown said.

She also hopes her son, who is interested in possibly majoring in biology, can become a doctor.

Ms. Brown credited prayer for helping them both get through the rough times.

They now have a place of their own, and she is glad the family's struggles have not deterred her son from pursuing his goals.

"I'm glad he was able to go on and didn't let it be a downfall and cause him to go backward in his education," she said. "He just kept going forward."

According to its Web site, "The Horatio Alger Association seeks to assist students who have demonstrated integrity and perseverance in overcoming adversity, strength of character, financial need, a good academic record, commitment to pursue a college education and a desire to contribute to society."

"I'm extremely proud of

Jonathan because he's an outstanding student and the Horatio Alger award recognizes those students who show evidence of integrity and perseverance in the face of adversity," John Tyler High Principal Dr. Michael McFarland said. "And he's had quite a bit of adversity to deal with, but he keeps coming through with shining colors."

Brown's resiliency and intelligence will help be successful in the future, McFarland said.

"He's just really one student who is indicative of the type of students we have here at John Tyler," he said.

"In spite of all the challenges, he's been able to succeed."

In fact, McFarland said, according to past class standings, Brown is in the running for valedictorian or salutatorian.

McFarland attributes that kind of success to Brown's mother and her commitment to see her son gets a quality education as well as Brown's personal drive to do well.

"She's really been involved," he said. "And ... he's the kind of kid that challenges himself and he wants to be the best."

COLLEGE HELP

John Tyler High School's College & Career Center has helped Brown and other students in their quest for information about scholarships and colleges.

"It is the heart of the whole school," Brown said.

With no Internet access at home, such a place gives students such as Brown an opportunity to look up information and get help in applying to colleges and for scholarships or other financial aid.

"That's where I applied for most of my scholarships," Brown said.

McFarland said the center has been "monumental as far as removing barriers."

"It is the hub of our campus," he said. "Kids can go in there freely ... Its made all the difference in the world as far as creating a college-going culture."

Griselda Dargan, an adviser in the center, said it shows students what is possible.

"With this career center being in place, it brings a light of possibility," Ms. Dargan said. "And that's all we need is possibility because possibility actually brings light to your dreams."

She said some parents have never gone to college and don't know the process of applying or the process of finding scholarships.

Ms. Dargan said the career center gives students a chance to see that "you can go to college."

"College is open for everyone," she said.

Like McFarland, Ms. Dargan is proud of Brown and knows he will return one day and serve as an example to others. He will be example to the community, she said, "to let them know that if you push, you will succeed and if you believe, you will achieve."