

Shoals Scholar Dollars



Student

of the

Year

2025



**Ava  
Risner**

Central High School



# Index

3. Student of the Year,  
Ava Caroline Risner
4. Brantley Allen May
4. Grace Anne Underwood
5. Ava Scarlet King
6. Paula Ines Mestas
6. John Luke Burns
7. Addison Grace Oden
8. Lillian Amanda Peck
8. Shila Nicole Marks
11. Aubrey Laken Johnston
12. Carson Eli Pounders
12. Mattley Reese Carpenter
13. Madilyn Rae Hanback
13. Alexis Elaine Grace Lell
14. Sophia Rose Saylor
14. Georgiana Noelle Kavich
15. Lillian Avery Lawson




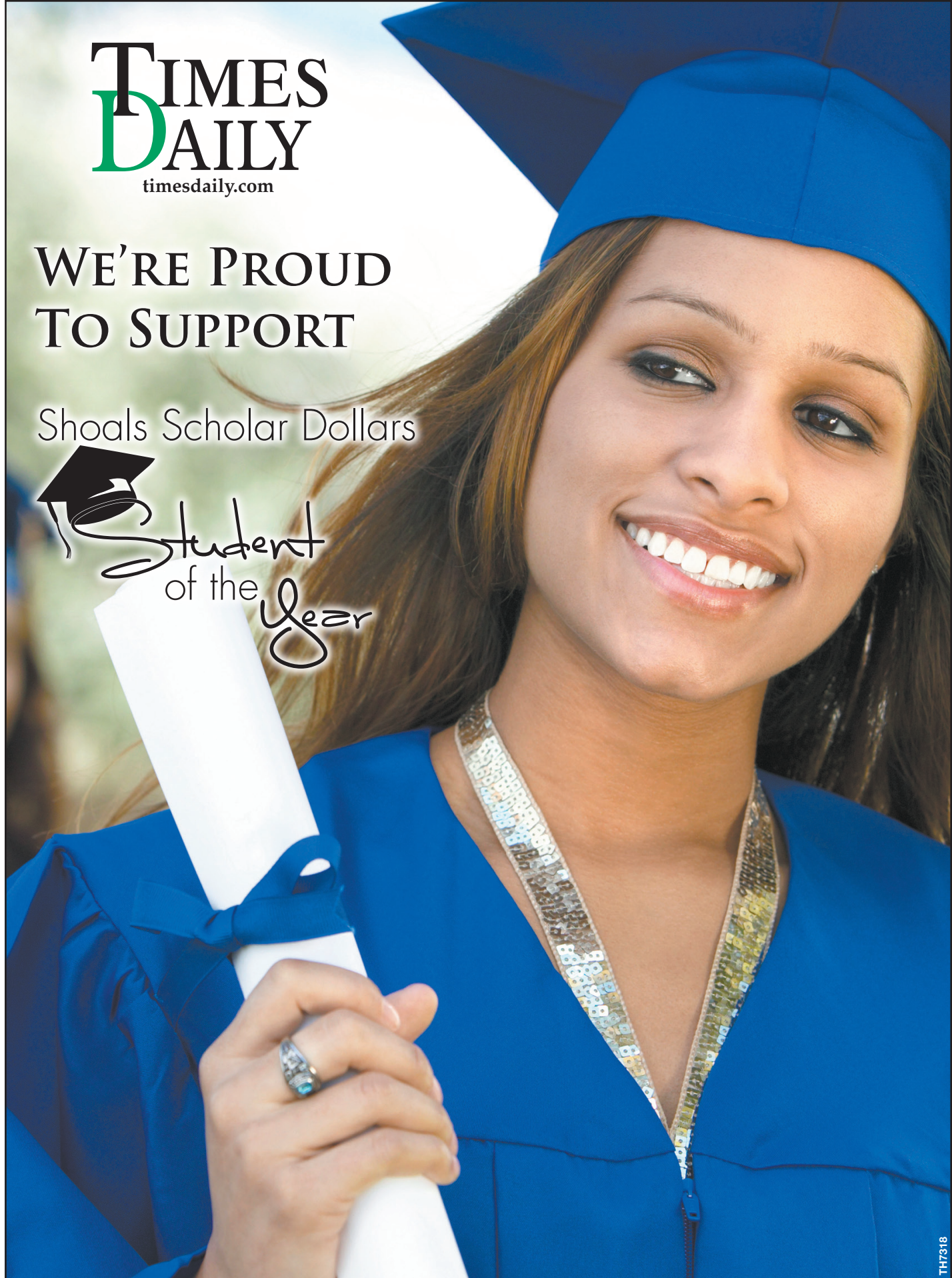
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## WE'RE PROUD TO SUPPORT

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# Scholar Dollars Student of the Year

## Ava Caroline Risner

It's easy to say that Ava is a perfectionist.

She said her biggest challenge since she was in elementary school was to get high anxiety when it came to tests and her grades.

She still gets nervous before a test and gets upset when she doesn't perform to her own high standards, but she's come to realize "there is more to life than getting a 100 on a pre-cal test."

But Ava would be the first one to tell you that she's more than just a perfectionist.

Through some ups and downs in her young life, she's also learned to persevere.

"To the outside world, I have a stereotypical cookie-cutter family. I have a loving mother, a hard-working father and a vexing older brother," she said.

But Ava admits she didn't fully have her father's presence through much of her childhood.

"He was there physically and did all he could to love us, but mentally he was never there," she said.

Her father was diagnosed with schizophrenia, depression and an anxiety disorder.

"Growing up with a mentally absent father put a strain on everyone, especially my mother. It made it very hard to get through the day.

"It was difficult to explain to people why my father stopped working, why he did not show up to any of my school events and why he was never really in the public eye. It was especially difficult to rationalize it, myself."

Rather than throwing her hands up and quitting on life and her future, Ava decided to take her future into her own hands.

"I realized I would need to do extremely well in high school so I could pay for

college," she said. "I have kept up my grades and am projected to be valedictorian of my class. I needed to be good at something to help get scholarships.

"I strive every day to be the best version of myself for my father, my mother, my peers and myself."

Her perseverance has paid off.

In addition to being first chair as a flautist for the concert band at Central High,

editor of Catchat, drum major of her marching band since she was a sophomore or a black belt in Taekwondo, she now has another achievement to add to resume.

Ava is the 2025 Shoals Scholar Dollars Student of the Year.

She became a leader among her peers at a young age. She was a section leader with the marching band as a freshman before becoming the band's drum major for the next three years.

She also was president of marketing for the school's robotics team and an officer for the school's science club.

Her volunteerism work has spread over the last four years. She began assisting with the school's Veterans Day program for Peers for Life and then became increasingly instrumental in helping younger up and coming band members by offering free flute lessons.

Ava plans to attend the University of North Alabama and pursue a degree in music education. Her ambition is to one day be a high school music educator.



Ava Caroline Risner

12th Grade • Central High School



Brantley Allen  
May  
12th Grade  
Brooks High School

Brantley is proud knowing he's defied the odds. As a freshman, bullying was a harsh reality for him. He said he dealt with daily physical, emotional and psychological harassment that took away from his academic focus, self-esteem and his desire to just function on a daily basis.

He said a traumatic incident changed the trajectory of his future. "Reflecting on my history of experiencing bullying, I learned that standing up and reporting bullying can cause fear of isolation," he said. "However, it can ignite a powerful era of self-improvement, confidence and new beginnings."

After enrolling in Brooks High, he has flourished. "[It] has been the most rewarding change in my life," he said. "I have a 3.89 grade point average, am member of FBLA, Key Club, student council, the National Honor Society and treasurer of Interact. ... Participation in clubs provided opportunities for community service and awakened a passion from the gratification of seeing smiles on people's faces."

While at Brooks, Brantley has taken on several community service projects through Key Club. He has helped with the Kiwanis breakfast, Reach and Teach concert, the book fair, Veterans Day programs and helping the elderly during storm cleanup or just helping serve meals to the elderly at church.

His aspiration after high school is to follow in the footsteps of his uncle, he said. "My uncle has had the biggest influence on my life. At 5 years old, I witnessed him graduate from law school at the University of Alabama. Not even knowing what an attorney was, I made the declaration I was going to be an attorney one day," he said. "Through my most impressionable years, I witnessed his success."

"He has given me great advice, job shadowing opportunities and countless instruction on how to look at situations I face daily. Seeing him succeed in a field I have an interest in motivates me to be better than him daily."

Grace Ann decided to challenge herself in school by stepping outside of her comfort zone through her involvement in FFA and Drama Club. Through her involvement, she also has excelled in both clubs. She became her school chapter's FFA president in her senior year and vice president of the school's Drama Club. But her leadership in her senior year didn't stop there. She also served a president of her school's Broadcasting Club and vice president of her class.

As a member of the school's FFA chapter, Grace Ann went on to win the state tile in parliamentary procedure and third place in the state in dairy judging. She also was a spotlight performer in singing the national anthem at the state convention.

"I am a true nature girl," she said. "I love to be outdoors and hunt, fish and hike."

Her involvement with FFA put her in the national spotlight. She was a national talent at the National FFA Convention during her junior year.

Music comes naturally for Grace Anne. She said that she loves to sing and play guitar. After graduation, she plans to attend Northwest Shoals Community College to become an ultrasound technician and eventually earn a degree in sonography.

Grace Anne said her greatest challenge so far in her young life has been to lose the one person she credits for being her greatest influence, her grandfather.

"He was diagnosed with glioblastoma when I was a freshman, and the first thing he said after his diagnosis was that he couldn't believe that he wouldn't get to see me graduate," she said. "Throughout his entire illness, he remained positive and strong in his faith. He never stopped teaching and encouraging us and learning to live without his strength and guidance has been the hardest thing I have ever been through."

"But I carry his lessons and love with me every day."



Grace Anne  
Underwood  
12th Grade  
Cherokee High School



Many students and even adults could identify with Ava's biggest challenge she said that she feels like she has overcome – self-doubt.

She said she's learned to overcome self-doubt when it comes to school, friends, family, work and the future.

"Since I can remember I have always been an optimist," she said. "Making my classmates feel included and never turning anyone away has been something really important to me. ... I believe that supporting others and encouraging my peers and classmates is a crucial part of becoming a leader."

Ava plans to attend Northwest Shoals Community College as she pursues a career in the medical or dental field.

Ava's leadership skills include serving as president of the student council, president of the outdoor club during her junior year and captain of the varsity volleyball team during her senior season. She also was nominated to represent her school at Girls State at the end of her junior year.

Ava has been on the All A honor roll since her freshman year and a member of the honor society since she was in seventh grade.

"I have always strived for excellence in my academics, and I hold myself accountable to do my best work in anything I do," she said.

Outside of academics, Ava has always had a creative mind. She paints and sketches. She also assisted in painting a mural for the Leighton Library.

While advocating for an outdoor classroom as president of the school's outdoor club, she also helped during Leighton's citywide cleanup project last year.

"At the end of the day, my character is one of my defining qualities," she said. "Anyone can have good grades. But when I am weary of the challenge ahead, I do my best in everything. I never give up."



**Ava Scarlet  
King**

12th Grade  
Colbert County High School

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Paula Ines  
Mestas  
12th Grade  
Colbert Heights High School

Paula has found strength in loss. She recently lost someone who was of great influence and beacon in her life. The unexpected loss of her majorette coach took a toll on Paula. She fell behind in school and her motivation to continue to twirl was almost gone.

“Before her passing, we always had conversations about the fun things we would do my senior season,” Paula said. “I always felt guilty during exciting moments because she wasn’t there to share them with me.”

That sense of guilt may still be there, but Paula has learned to change. “I’m using that sadness that I feel as motivation to make her proud,” Paula said. And there’s plenty for her late coach to be proud of.

In addition to being the captain of the majorettes, she has taken on several leadership roles with other organizations within her school. She serves as president of the school’s HOSA and DECA chapters. She also is an officer in student council and for the Troupe 8487 Thespian Society.

After graduation, Paula plans to attend the University of West Alabama to pursue a nursing degree. She already has earned her certified nursing assistant certificate and is currently working to earn her pharmacy tech certificate. Her goal is to become a pediatric oncologist.

In addition to performing with the marching band as a majorette, Paula has built a passion for performing in theater.

She has been active in working with her fellow students, who present two theater productions each year. She also has become immersed in community theater.

She has been a part of more than a dozen theatrical performances at the Shoals Theater and the Ritz Theater as well as taking part in the annual production of “The Miracle Worker” at Ivy Green.

Paula also has taken on several community service opportunities from serving as a volunteer at Helen Keller Hospital to volunteering for LifeSouth blood drives through the school’s HOSA chapter.

“Being a part of the Shoals community has molded me into the person I am,” she said.



Hard work is something John Luke doesn’t shy away from. Being raised on a farm, he’s learned the value of hard work whether it be in the classroom, the playing field or by managing his own lawncare business.

“I have been taught to give everything 100% effort, not giving up regardless of the situation and doing everything for the glory of God,” he said.

After high school, John Luke plans to attend Northwest Shoals Community College and then transfer to another school to complete his bachelor’s degree.

“I’m very fond of this area and would love to get a job in the Shoals and give back to the community where I grew up,” he said.

Where does John Luke get that drive?

He said his father has been his biggest influence.

“He loves others and exemplifies that by showing compassion at his job and away from it,” John Luke said. “He continues to show me how to have a Christ-like attitude in every situation, whether that be home with my family, at school with my peers or when communicating with clients while working.”

In addition to his lawncare business, John Luke also has been a part of his school’s varsity baseball team for two years, junior varsity basketball and varsity cross country and robotics teams for a year each. He also remains active with the school’s Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Some of his leadership roles include being student council president the last two years, president of the National Honor Society, President of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Boys State and DAR School representative.

His community service activities range from being an Eagle Mentor at Covenant Christian to serving as a vacation Bible school counselor at his church.

“Looking back on my time in high school, I am proud of the work I’ve done and the growth I’ve experienced as a student, leader and individual,” he said. “My dedication to academics, leadership and making a positive impact in my school community has molded me into the young man I am today.”



John Luke  
Burns  
12th Grade  
Covenant Christian School



Addison believes there is more to leadership than just being a leader. Being involved with several activities, clubs and other extracurricular activities, she has discovered being a leader also involves making an impact.

“Leadership isn’t just about taking the lead, but it is about lifting others up and creating an environment in which everyone can thrive and be their best selves,” she said. “Serving in various school and community organizations has allowed me to collaboratively build a positive and encouraging environment for everyone.”

She’s also taken lifting others up to another level through her hobby of designing banners for her family and friends.

She later created addisonpaints on Instagram, where she shares photos of her finished banners. She said the exposure has led to more custom banner designs and customers.

“I create TikToks of my creative process and then get to deliver the finished banner to [my customers] for their special event,” she said. “This is a fun hobby that I’ve been able to share with others.”

Addison doesn’t shy away from being a leader at Deshler, either. She’s served as president student council, Key Club and her freshman and sophomore classes.

She also has been captain of the high school cheer squad, while also serving in various leadership roles in other organizations from Bellezza Bella to DECA.

Being involved with so many clubs and organizations, Addison also has taken part in several community service activities from volunteering for the St. Jude Trail Ride to serving as a volunteer during the Shoals area Special Olympics.

“I believe in giving back and being a responsible role model for others,” she said. “My extracurricular activities have provided me with many opportunities to work collaboratively with my peers to organize events, establish school spirit and support causes that make a difference.

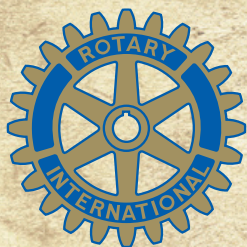
“Whether helping with community service projects, school activities or assisting teachers, I am always eager to lend a hand and strive to make an impact.”



**Addison Grace  
Oden**  
12th Grade  
Deshler High School

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Lillian Amanda  
Peck  
12th Grade  
Florence High School

Lilli needed something and someone to help her break out of her shell and she found that through music and her beginning band director.

As a beginning band student, Lilli admits she was shy and introverted, but an introduction to percussion by her instructor helped her to blossom and shine.

“Playing hard and practicing gave me something positive to focus on,” she said. “I saw consistent results as long I as was willing to put the work in.”

Russell Belote, who was Lilli’s beginning band director, accepted Lilli for who she was and encouraged her to just be herself.

“He would say the right people, opportunities and places would follow me as long as I stayed true to myself,” she said. “As a result, I came out of my shell quite a bit through the years.”

It’s not surprising to know that Lilli plans to attend the University of North Alabama and major in music education and audition for the university’s percussion studio and the Marching Pride.

“My dream is to become a band director,” she said. “I would love to influence students in the positive way that I’ve been influenced by all of my directors and teachers.”

Much of Lilli’s leadership has been made useful with the Florence High Big Blue Marching Band. She has served as percussion section leader and percussion captain. She also is the historian for the high school’s National Honor Society chapter.

Aside from music and band, Lilli has taken part in several community service activities from serving as a volunteer helper at the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library to serving in various volunteer capacities with her church.

And she’s managed to do all of this while maintaining a 4.0 grade point average.

“Coming from an Asian background, a strong work ethic has been ingrained in me for as long as I can remember,” she said. “My work ethic has served me well in my academic studies as well as my extracurricular activities.”

Shila is used to being a leader.

As captain of the girls varsity basketball team, she helped lead the Tigers to the program’s 14th state championship and was named First Team All-State by the Alabama Sports Writers Association.

She’s also been a leader serving as captain of the varsity softball team and a captain on the school’s math team.

“I strive to incorporate the qualities of dedication, perseverance and teamwork into my everyday life,” she said. “Athletics have been a cornerstone of my high school career. As a member of the basketball and softball teams, I have learned the importance of discipline, resilience and teamwork.

“Balancing athletic commitments, academic responsibilities and leadership roles have taught me time management and goal-setting, which I carry into every aspect of life.”

Winning on the court has also flowed over to the classroom. She has maintained a 4.3 grade point average while taking honors and dual credit classes.

Shila is just as involved in clubs and organizations as she is with athletics. She is a member of the Key Club, Beta Club, Biology Club, National Honor Society, National Technical Honor Society, FCCLA, FFA and the Chick-fil-A Leadership Academy.

This fall, Shila plans to attend Shelton State Community College on a basketball scholarship. She plans to pursue a degree in computer science/engineering, she said hopefully at the University of North Alabama.

“Using my degree, I want to enter a government job with the FBI to serve and protect people,” she added.

Outside of school, Shila enjoys movies, watching TV and reading mystery thrillers.

“I also love anything Disney,” she said. “When I was little, I always wanted to be Belle because of her strength and intelligence and her amazing library.”



Shila Nicole  
Marks  
12th Grade  
Lauderdale County High School



# Shoals Scholar Dollars makes College a Reality for Area Students

Since its inception in 2011, Shoals Scholar Dollars has helped almost 3,000 students in Colbert and Lauderdale Counties be able to attend college. The brainchild of the Florence/Greater Shoals Rotary Club, SSD has maintained its 501(c)3 nonprofit status and continues to further the education of local high school seniors. With our partnerships at Northwest Shoals Community College and the University of North Alabama, Shoals young people are able to continue their schooling and learn skills that allow them to enter the workforce in our area and become productive members of our community. We are funded strictly through donations and exciting community events during the year:

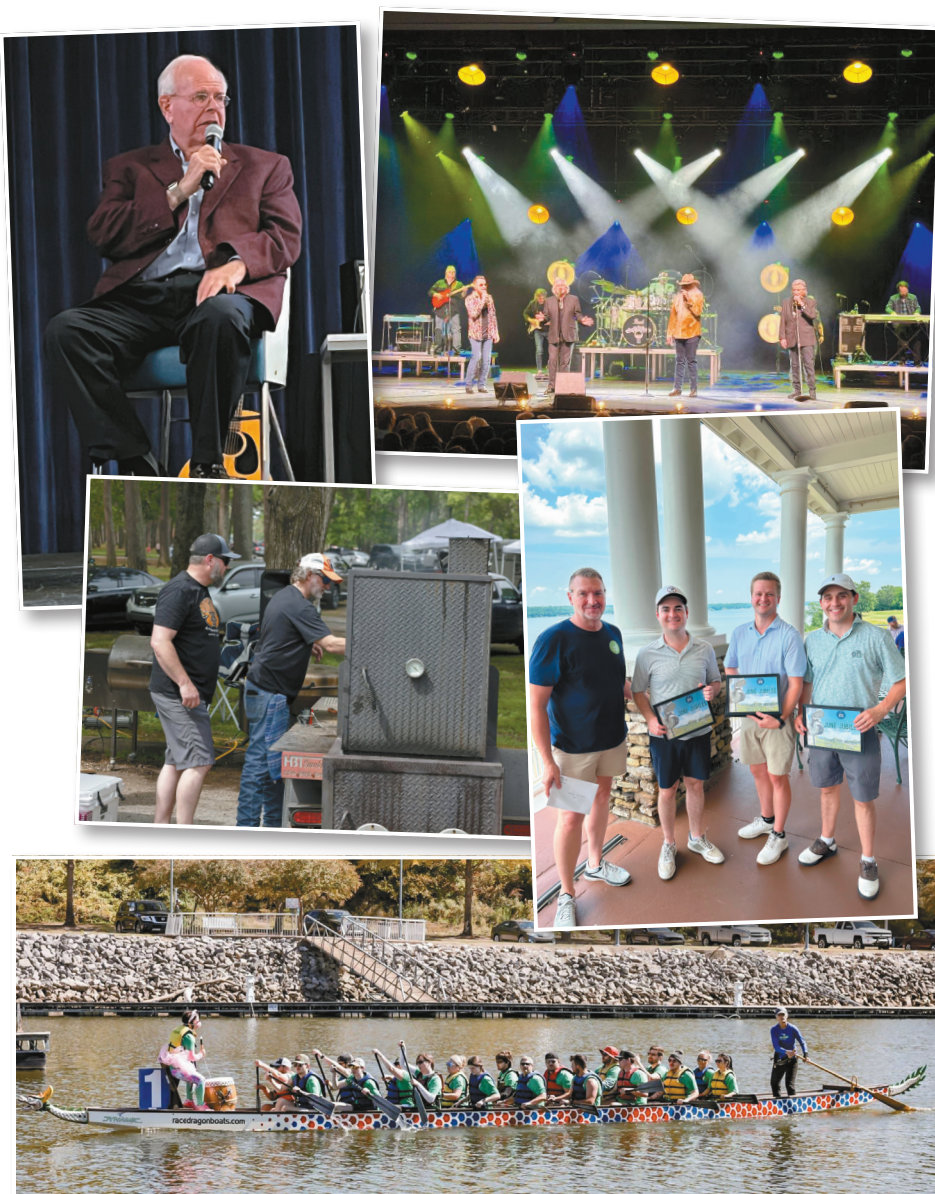
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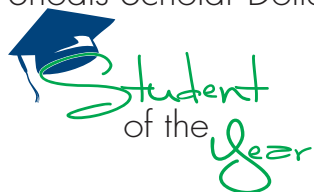
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There are my types of people in the world. Aubrey's type would have to be a nurturer. Her care for others is evident inside and outside of school. She takes pride in helping create a positive environment within her school from helping decorate the halls for the holidays to planning Christmas parties.

"I love making scenarios where people can connect and make memories," she said.

After she graduates from high school, she plans to go to college and pursue a bachelor's degree in nursing and eventually work in the intensive care unit or emergency department of a hospital.

But her goal doesn't stop just within working in a hospital.

"Once I gain enough experience with the world of medicine, I hope to work with disaster relief," she said. "I hope to work in triage for as long as I can. I want to help people and be there on their worst day."

Aubrey understands what it's like to deal with bad days.

Two years ago, she was getting chronic migraines and sought treatment for it. It meant a three-week hospital stay where she was put on strong medications that kept her from eating and resulted in losing about a third of her bodyweight. She also had a neurological reaction to the medication.

"The symptoms were none like I had seen before," she said. "I didn't know what was happening, and I was terrified. For a minute I truly thought I was dying."

Soon after her treatment there were certain things which would trigger memories of her treatment like the smell of cleaning solutions and a baby crying.

"This was something I struggled with and was ashamed of," she said.

But not anymore. Aubrey said she's worked through her struggles.

Some of Aubrey's community service activities include Eteam Chicago, which assisted underprivileged families in the Chicago area. She also took part in the Eldridge Toy Run to raise funds to afford toys for orphaned children at Christmas along with decking the halls at Lexington by helping to decorate the halls for the holidays.

Every year, since her freshman year, Aubrey also has taken part in St. Jude letters where she writes letter to patients at St. Jude Hospital.

Some of her leadership work includes being a color guard captain and Purple Pride auxiliary captain for the school marching band as well as being an officer for the FCCLA.

"My favorite thing is to make others smile and ensure everyone has a shoulder to cry on," she said.



**Aubrey Laken  
Johnston**

**11th Grade  
Lexington High School**

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# Carson Eli Pounders

12th Grade  
Mars Hill Bible School

There aren't many mornings when the elementary school children at Mars Hill don't see Eli when they arrive. He's there to welcome them to another day at school and sometimes gets pulled into some deep one-on-one conversations.

Mars Hill Principal Kim Chandler said she would not know what she would do without the help from Eli and his friends.

"Eli greets each and every student with a smile and a good morning," she said. "Some students stop to talk to him about whatever is on their mind, and those are some of the sweetest conversations. Eli is kind to the young students, and he makes them feel important."

Eli took it upon himself to be a beacon for the young elementary school children.

It's just his nature, which may seem odd, given some of the challenges he's had to face at a young age.

"After my parents got divorced when I was younger, I was forced to mature at a much faster rate than other kids my age," he said. "I never got to relax because I was always on the go. I have since had two different stepfathers, a stepmother and nine siblings. These events have cause me to live life always on the move, which is ironic because I have lived in eight different houses."

Eli also is a natural leader. He has served in various offices in different organizations, including being the team captain of the boys varsity basketball team which won the state championship last season and played for the state title again this season.

In addition to being part of the morning welcoming group to Mars Hill, Eli has taken part in various volunteer activities within the school. He has served as the "fellowships" devotional leader, an ambassador of the school, an Isah's Call volunteer and been part of the Lead Team for school events.

This fall, he will enroll at Freed Hardeman University where he will play basketball and be a double major in Bible and communications.

Mattley remembers going to her mother's classroom every day after school and helping her do random classroom jobs. In the summer, she accompanied her mother to her classroom to assist in setting up her room for a new school year.

Mattley now hopes to one day set up her own classroom and follow in her mother's footsteps as a teacher.

She plans to attend the University of North Alabama, where her mother and father are alums, and pursue a degree in secondary education with an emphasis in mathematics.

"I've always been interested in math, and I love the challenge of critical thinking that it presents," she said. "I love helping students work through problem sets, and it is rewarding to see others succeed in math with the right encouragement."

Mattley maintained an unweighted 4.0 grade point average from her freshman year until her senior year in high school, while also being active with the cheerleading squad.

Being a cheerleader also has been therapeutic for Mattley. She has a passion for tumbling. On her worst days, she says that she uses tumbling to help her rid herself of frustrations.

"Cheerleading has taught me so much more than tumbling and stunting," she said. "It has taught me the discipline to set goals, the craving for hard work to achieve them and the confidence to push myself through mental blocks."

Mattley also will be a part of the UNA cheerleading squad this fall.

Aside from her dedicated work to cheerleading, she used her leadership skills to serve as vice president in the SkillsUSA Computer Science club since her sophomore year. She also served as a Trojan Ambassador in her junior and senior years in high school.

Mattley remained active in various community service events from serving as a volunteer at Webster Elementary and a student aide at Howell Graves Preschool to volunteering with the annual Swampers 5K run.



# Mattley Reese Carpenter

12th Grade  
Muscle Shoals High School



Madilyn has certainly become a big advocate for mental health awareness. She said her biggest challenge so far has been to find balance with her extracurricular activities, academics and personal life while maintaining solid mental health. She has stressed mental health within the Alabama public schools by serving on State Department of Education Superintendent Dr. Eric Mackey's Student Advisory Committee in 2023. She hopes to continue her work and advocacy for good mental health while also pursuing a nursing degree at the University of North Alabama.

"In the future, I hope to become a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner and start my own practice," she said.

Leadership is something Madilyn has not shied away from. She served in various leadership roles on the district and state levels of the Future Business Leaders of America. In fact, she served as state president of FBLA during her senior year.

As an active member and officer of the FBLA, Madilyn led or assisted in 15 leadership development conferences to help students with topics of competing, fundraising and recruitment.

"I have truly grown as a person while helping others grow," she said.

As a member of the Rogers Marching Band, she served as co-captain in her junior year and then captain her senior year.

She also served as editor of the school's yearbook, The Jolly Roger, her junior and senior years.

She managed to take part in all of these activities while also maintaining a 4.1 grade point average and completing 32 hours of dual college credits.

Her community service work began as early as her freshman year by serving as the food drive coordinator for the Rogers chapter of FBLA. She also served as a volunteer at Florence-Lauderdale Animal Services and in creating Christmas stockings and care packages for area nursing homes.

As a Key Club member, she also volunteered with the club's blood drives.

Outside of school, she served in the children's ministry at Faith Church and Living Water.



**Madilyn Rae  
Hanback**

**12th Grade  
Rogers High School**



**Alexis Elaine  
Grace Lell**

**12th Grade  
Sheffield High School**

Alexis could be considered the comeback kid in every sense.

When she was little, she was bounced around from home to home, a mental hospital and even a group home after her mother fell into a deep addiction.

Her mother then realized that she could not give Alexis and her sister what they needed after Alexis became victim to a sexual assault by a family member.

"My mom ended up leaving us with my sister's dad believing it was safer for us," Alexis said. "Her father did not want to keep me because I was not his child, so he gave me to his family members."

From there, Alexis said she was handed back and forth between homes.

"By the time I was 12, while everyone knew I was extremely smart, they all expected me to fail, she said."

Alexis eventually developed several mood disorders, including severe depression and anxiety.

"The narcissistic and emotionally abusive people who cared for me as family made me look at myself as a mistake and a burden ... and this made me give up on attempting to better my life," she said.

Between age 13 and 14 she said she went back and forth to mental hospitals and ended up in a group home for two years before moving in with her grandmother.

She fell behind in school until she arrived at Sheffield High.

"From the moment she arrived, Alexis challenged herself and her teachers," wrote Sheffield High Counselor Tracy Parker. "She asked to be removed from special education and begged for just one semester to demonstrate her capabilities. Not only did she prove her worth, she excelled in every area earning no grade lower than a B."

Within a year's time, Alexis caught up and will graduate this May.

She plans to attend Northwest Shoals Community College to work toward becoming a medical examiner and later majoring in forensics at the University of North Alabama.

"I'd like to believe that I've come a long way from where most people expected me to end up," she said.





Sophia Rose  
Saylor

12th Grade  
Shoals Christian School

Sophie loves the feeling of togetherness and community. That's why she stays immersed in so many activities inside and outside of school. While an active member of the Shoals Christian band of which she has been the drum major since her sophomore year, she also has served as the lead organizer and singer for the school's praise band.

She also has served as president of the schools Tri M music, Spanish Honor Society and LifeSouth Club, while also serving as vice president of the Key Club since her junior year.

When she's not at school, she remains busy by volunteering each summer at a 3-week long summer camp in Pennsylvania for special needs children and adults.

"I serve as a counselor, which requires me to give 24/7 care," she said. "It's the most difficult yet rewarding time of my year. The friends I've made over the past 10 years hold a special place in my heart."

Sophie plans to pursue a career in nursing. She hopes to eventually become a labor and delivery nurse. While she attends college, Sophie hopes to study abroad and minor either in sign language or Spanish.

"Throughout my life I've dealt with moving to different states and schools, losing friends and family members, been bullied and dealt with mental health and body image issues. At times I've struggled with my faith. I don't know how to label one of my 'biggest' challenges, but I struggle with loneliness. I hate the feeling of being alone.

"That is part of why I love to involve myself in so many activities. I love the feeling of togetherness and community and sharing that with others."

Georgiana's drive to help others came when it was someone else who helped her at a time of trauma.

"When I was 9 years old, I experienced a life-changing event. I was at an after-school program and my mom was waiting outside to pick me up. As I was walking down the sidewalk to get in the car, a vehicle was trying to back out of the parking lot. Instead of being in reverse, the car was in drive and came right toward me," she said. "The vehicle ran me over, and I sustained life-threatening injuries.

"There was a bus waiting to leave for a basketball game and two seniors who happened to be volunteer firefighters were on the bus and saw what happened. These two boys, along with other members of the Waterloo Volunteer Fire Department, helped save me. This experience helped me realize that I wanted to help other people in the same way that the people at the scene of my accident helped me."

Since Georgiana has been a freshman, she's been a member of the Waterloo Volunteer Fire Department.

This fall she plans to attend Northwest Shoals Community College and enroll in its diagnostic imaging program. She eventually wants to become a registered radiology technologist.

Georgiana is an active leader in school from serving as an officer on student council to being captain of the softball team the last two years. She's also serving as the school's yearbook editor for the second time in three years.

In addition to being a volunteer firefighter, Georgiana has been an active volunteer in various activities from blood drives to taking part in Operation Christmas Child.

Georgiana also says the accident taught her a life lesson.

"It made me realize that we are not promised tomorrow," she said. "So you have to go for your dreams when you have the chance."



Georgiana  
Noelle Kavich

12th Grade  
Waterloo High School



All too many high school students learn how to balance academics with extracurricular activities, whether it be athletics, band, clubs or yearbook.

Some also may take on a part-time job along the way.

Lillian can identify and has been able to do so much more.

She's managed to balance her academics while also holding down a full-time job and being a mother.

"Many people know me as the girl who had a baby during my freshman year of high school, but little do people know I am much more than that," she said. "While my pregnancy was a heavy burden, I am determined to not let it define me or my academic future."

In fact Lillian may be ahead of most of her senior classmates. Just this year she has earned her Emergency Medical Technician license and hopes to have her Certified Nursing Assistant license by graduation.

"I will be a first-generation college student, and I hope become a registered nurse," she said. "I want to go into the medical field because I have a desire to show compassion and healing to those who are sick or injured."

In addition to holding down a full-time job and raising a 2-year-old daughter, Lillian has stayed on the A&B honor roll since her freshman year.

She quickly learned to be a mom and credits her mother for being her greatest influence.

"She supports me through all the rock bottoms of my life, and she is there when it's time to celebrate," she said. "I owe her everything in my life because she strives for her kids to be successful. My mom works hard for me and my siblings, and she provides me with everything I need even when that means she has to go without. She is ultimately the most selfless person ever."

Lillian also has learned to overcome and step up when it's time from her mother, too.

"I'm still navigating the changes that come with raising a toddler," she said. "But I feel like she gives me a reason to work hard for success."



**Lillian Avery  
Lawson**

**12th Grade  
Wilson High School**



## ***Congratulations to our students nominated for Student of the Year***



**Brantley May**  
Brooks High School



**Ava Risner**  
Central High School



**Shila Marks**  
Lauderdale County  
High School



**Aubrey Johnston**  
Lexington  
High School



**Madilyn Hanback**  
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**Georgiana Kavich**  
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