



Horatio Alger Scholarship Opens Doors to Red Cloud Seniors

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“It makes me feel better about my hardships,” says Justin Mesteth as he sits next to Wayne Ghost, both ambitious young leaders with contrastingly bright personalities. What draws these two together? They both are recipients of the 2016 Horatio Alger Scholarship.

As graduating seniors at Red Cloud Indian School, Justin and Wayne were awarded the distinguished [Horatio Alger State Scholarship](#) last week, making them two of only 556 students nationwide to receive the scholarship. Awarded by the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans, the scholarship honors the achievements of students who have overcome adversity to achieve academic success.

“I didn’t go into it with expectations, so when I got the award envelope it was surprising,” says Wayne.



Expectations are something Wayne has learned are often changing and surpassed. A dream of becoming an educator one day, for example, is not where he always imagined himself. “Clare Huerter, who is now our Dean of Students, opened a lot of doors for me, English-wise, around the things that I could do and the possibilities that come along with it. She has played a very significant role,” Wayne



explains. That inspiration, coupled with a passion for reading and writing, has led to plans of majoring in primary education with a minor in English.

“I’ve been writing a lot since sixth grade. I started turning to reading and writing as an outlet.” And one day, he adds, he hopes to write a book.

Until then, Wayne will continue to focus much of his free time applying to colleges, universities and available scholarships. It is hard work that has paid off so far. As of today, Wayne has been accepted into nine colleges and universities. “I’ve applied to...,” he pauses before continuing, “I don’t even know if I could count them all. But I’ve been accepted into nine colleges: Augustana College, Dakota Wesleyan University, South Dakota State University, University of South Dakota, Black Hills State University, Albright College, Richmond University, University of Sioux Falls and Southwest Minnesota State University.” He lists them with a modest tone, using his fingers to keep a tally. Out of the list, he has his eyes set on two. “I’ve been looking at Augustana and Albright College in Pennsylvania because I received a sizable scholarship from each.”



Across the table his classmate Justin relays his own, sometimes challenging, path to today. As a [determined and goal-oriented student](#), Justin has also spent much of this past year working to improve his future opportunities. “I went through a lot this past year – losing my grandfather and grandma in the same week and my dad going into a hospital a week before that.” Despite these challenges Justin perseveres and is succeeding academically. He is achieving dream goals like acceptance into his top choice university. “It gave me the understanding that bad things are going to happen but there are always good things that come with it.” He credits Red Cloud staff like Nakina



Mills, director of student advancement and alumni support, for guiding him through hardship. “She is kind of like my mom – the mom I never had.”

Justin was recently accepted into [Wesleyan University](#) in Connecticut with a full-ride scholarship, a feat he could not have done alone he says. “My Gates mentor, Dominique Fenton, pushed me into thinking about Wesleyan. I honestly never heard about it until we were doing the Questbridge scholarship application. As he told me about the school, I instantly saw myself there.” Receiving the scholarship, he says, is a burden off his shoulders. “I’ve been stressing about college since my sophomore year and how I was going to pay for it. I don’t have to worry about it anymore. I’m going to a really good college and I’m going to do the best I can while there.”

Justin plans on pursuing a career in civil engineering and says Red Cloud’s strong STEM program has helped him in making that choice. With national support from the [Toyota USA Foundation](#), Hydrite Chemical, the [Woape Foundation](#) and other partners, the school has been able to implement state-of-the-art labs, a range of [classroom and after school opportunities](#), and even a [geodesic greenhouse](#). As a result, over the past several years, more Red Cloud graduates have worked toward [a degree in a STEM field](#) than ever before, with nearly a third of this year’s graduates planning to do the same. Justin follows in their footsteps. “I’m taking a computer programming class and it’s helped me a lot to understand the programming part of engineering.” He also took inspiration from his Science of Society and Technology class. “We were doing a lot of hands-on building and that really inspired me to want to building things.”

As Justin looks toward the future he sees himself coming home. “I look at my reservation and see how we need a lot of improvements, like roads and buildings. I see how [engineering] could open a lot of doors for the reservation.”

With graduation nearing both Wayne and Justin are anxious for the next chapter in their lives. “It’s kind of surreal that I’m at this point, because it felt like my freshman year was not that long ago,” says Wayne. Justin adds, “I’m going to be 1,700 miles away from home but this place will always be here. The only thing that I’m going to miss is my family and the freedom of living in a big open country.”