

Hillsdale man awarded prestigious scholarship



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By Matthew Maneval

HILLSDALE — Cody Blair was recently awarded an all expenses paid scholarship by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NEAYC) to attend their national conference in Dallas this Nov. 5-8.

Blair grew up in Pittsford and now lives in Hillsdale. He's a student and a preschool teacher at Community Action Agency and was chosen as one of 10 recipients in the country for the Lasting Legacy Scholarship.

According to the association's website, the NAEYC established the Building a Lasting Legacy Scholarship to allow future leaders to experience the many opportunities for professional development and networking at NAEYC conferences. These merit-based awards cover registration costs for 10 recipients at the Annual Conference.

The NAEYC describes its mission as to serve and act on behalf of the needs, rights and well-being of all young children with primary focus on the provision of educational and developmental services and resources.

Blair said he had always wanted to go the NAEYC national conference. However, it's very expensive considering the travel and stay expenses in addition to taking time away from work in school.

He said he came across an article regarding a scholarship and decided to apply.

"I really didn't expect to win," said Blair. "I don't get nervous, but I'm a little nervous now."

At the conference Blair will be able to talk to and work with specialists, researchers and other dignitaries in the early childhood education field.

Blair said he's looking forward to the opportunity to network and bring new ideas to the Hillsdale community.

Carola Thomas works with Community Action Agency in Hillsdale as an early learning mentor coach and an education supervisor. She wrote a letter of recommendation for Blair for his scholarship application.

She said she knew of Blair a few years ago when they were both attending Baker College.

"When I started attending college classes he was in a number of my classes," said Thomas.

"About three years ago I got a position as a mentor coach," she continued. "As a mentor coach, my job was to observe different classes in Hillsdale County — and afterwards I would write up a report of what I observed."

After observing Blair in the classroom working as a teacher's assistant, Thomas said what she saw was phenomenal.

"He was all about the children," Thomas said. "Never did I see him standing in the corner talking to another staff member. He was always working with with the kids."

Thomas said any parent would want Blair as their child's teacher.

Once Blair moved from an Early Head Start classroom to a Great Start Readiness Program classroom, Thomas said she was equally impressed.

Page 2 of 2 - "This summer Cody was taking a course where he had to put in some hours in administration," said Thomas. "He came into my office to offer hours of service — and he was my second hand. We clicked and it was just a great few weeks working with him.

"When the teachers got back after the summer Cody helped me organize some meetings," added Thomas. "He was very, very supportive."

In summing up Blair and his work ethic, Thomas said, "He's a star."

Blair said he admires the Head Start program because of the high standards it requires.

He's now working with 4-year-olds, but has experience with infants and toddlers up to 3 years old. Blair said he calls the programs "wholesome" because he's not just working with the child, but also with their family.

"Since I was young I always wanted to be a teacher," said Blair.

He said it's the rewarding feeling of helping people that makes the profession appealing and that he's inspired by the love and support he's received from people like his mother, Dawn Blair.

In addition to working in the classroom and being a student, for the past three years Blair has been on the Early Childhood Education Advisory Board at Baker College. The board gets together twice a year and discusses issues with state administrators.

Blair will have his bachelor's degree in December and said he would like to continue his education through a master's degree and even possibly a doctorate degree.

He's already looking at multiple colleges in hopes of completing a master's program.

"I've really enjoyed the administrative part; being an advocate for families and giving young children a voice," said Blair.

Cody said he hopes he can stay and work in Hillsdale when he's done with his own education.

"When I was younger I always wanted to go somewhere else," said Blair. "But I really like working in Hillsdale. We have a great program here."