

Press Release



Battle Ground Public Schools

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Aspiring astrophysicist from Prairie High is National Merit Scholarship semifinalist

Peter Senchyna, Prairie High, 9-22-10

Peter Senchyna, a Prairie High School senior whose eyes are on the stars, has been named a National Merit semifinalist. He credits the Science Olympiad program at Maple Grove Middle School for helping launch his interest in space when he was a student there.

Peter is among some 16,000 semifinalists in the nation out of approximately 1.5 million students who took the combined PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test). Next spring, approximately 8,400 of the 16,000 semifinalists will be awarded scholarships in the program. Peter is one of 15 semifinalists in Clark County from six high schools. According to the National Merit Scholarship Corp. (www.nationalmerit.org), the other 14 include: three from Camas High; two from Union; four from Columbia River; four from Mountain View and one from Washougal.

Peter hopes to attend the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, majoring in astrophysics. The University of Washington is his second choice. When asked if there was “an ‘A-ha!’ moment” in his life when he knew he wanted to study the heavens, he cited the Science Olympiad program at Maple Grove Middle School for his interest.

“It definitely was a catalyst,” he said, adding that the program’s faculty advisor at that time was Ronald Wright. Maple Grove Middle School still has an aggressive Science Olympiad program, advised by teacher Barry Hoffman. Hoffman and Principal Bill Penrose credit the parents of Maple Grove’s young scientists’ for their support of the team every year.

Besides six classes at Prairie, including three Advanced Placement courses, Peter is taking calculus-based physics at Clark College. His brother Gregory is a freshman at Prairie. One of Peter’s non-academic interests is feeding the homeless and hungry. He is among about 10 high school students – most but not all from Prairie – who have created what they call the

Vancouver Burrito Project. They make burritos every Friday afternoon and distribute them for free to homeless and hungry people at Esther Short Park in downtown Vancouver.

Last year, Battle Ground Public Schools had two National Merit semifinalists, Jenna Brown and Patrick Moynihan, both from CAM Jr. - Sr. High. Patrick went on to win a National Merit scholarship to the University of Southern California.

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Following contact information is for reporters' use and not intended for publication

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