



SCHOLARSHIPS

Elks Lodge helps high school students start college on the right foot

By Maggie Ireland, for The Gazette

This is the time of year when many high school students are waiting to hear back on their scholarship applications, hoping to get help paying for college.

Ricky Arbogast, as the scholarship chairperson for the Cedar Rapids Elks Lodge No. 251, gets a front-row seat to that effort.

The Cedar Rapids Elks chapter, she said, has awarded more than \$4.6 million in scholarships to area students since its inception. Nationally, the Elks award 500 Most Valuable Student Scholarships each year, ranging from \$4,000 up to \$50,000 paid over four years.

Arbogast knows that higher education can be expensive. That's why, she said, the Elks scholarships are of critical assistance to young people and for

the community.

"I think right now it is extremely important because we've been through a derecho, and then there's the pandemic on top of it," she said. "A lot of people are without jobs, and a lot of kids maybe can't afford going to college at this point.

"It's amazing how many people said in their application that the income

need is so great because of the pandemic. It's very critical at this time."

Also because of the pandemic, this was the first year the Elks Lodge vetted scholarship applications online, Arbogast said.

She and the scholarship committee read through dozens of applications and scored them based on a set criteria. Once the local winners were select-

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ed, their applications were passed along to compete at the state and national level.

"I was very impressed by the quality of the applications," she said. "Many students are involved in community service and hold jobs — I don't see when these kids sleep."

For those high school students looking ahead to college and thinking about scholarships, Arbogast has some advice.

"I would say to these young people that they need to be diligent, not only as a student, but also in other areas. Take part in extracurricular activities you can shine in," she said. "Do community service. Be employed. Have fun.

"There's huge value in education —



Ricky Arbogast, Elks Lodge scholarship chairperson.
Submitted photo

it's something that can never be taken away from you, and it's so important."

Arbogast, a teacher for more than 30 years, said scholarship opportunities are plentiful for the motivated student.

"Most of the fraternal organizations and many other local and national organizations have scholarship programs available," she said.

For the Elks scholarships, she said, "we take a look at financial need, academics, leadership, community service, grade point average and any honors the student has received."

Though the application deadline has passed for this year's Elks' scholarships — winners will be announced in April — other scholarships remain open.

Students should check with their high school counselor for information.

The Elks also offer vocational grants of \$1,500 to students pursuing a two-year degree or certification in a vocational field, including to older, non-traditional students pursuing a vocational degree.

Students don't have to be related to an Elks Lodge member to apply for the organization's scholarships or grants, though the Elks also award legacy grants to the children and grandchildren of Elks club members each year.



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