

Ritenour Students Share Life Lessons upon Graduation

As they neared graduation this spring, two members of the Ritenour High School Class of 2013 shared life lessons they learned while growing up in the Ritenour School District.

Seth Huntington, an Overland resident who has spent his entire 13-year educational career in Ritenour schools, graduated magna cum laude on June 1 and will be attending Saint Louis University (SLU) this fall. Ioana Baiatu, who emigrated from Romania in 2005 and has spent the last eight years in Ritenour schools, graduated as valedictorian and will be attending Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. this fall.

Though both students had vastly different backgrounds and challenges during their journey through Ritenour, both attribute much of their success to a sense of personal fortitude that teachers instilled in them.

Meet Seth Huntington

Ritenour Career: *Wyland Elementary, Ritenour Middle School, Ritenour High School*

Upcoming College Career: *Saint Louis University with plans to study German and mechanical engineering*

Shortly after finishing a 15-page paper for his English final in May, Huntington recalled some of his earliest memories of kindergarten at Wyland with his teacher, Kent Adams.

“Mr. Adams showed me what I could do, and showed me if I pushed myself I could achieve things,” recalls Huntington.

Since then, he says pushing himself to achieve at higher levels than he originally expects and getting outside his comfort zone have been reinforced by his parents as well as teachers throughout his Ritenour career.

Beyond academics, Huntington says he pushed himself past physical limits this year when he trained to run in a 13.1 mile race through Students on the Go in the Go! St. Louis Half Marathon in April. Although he never considered himself a runner, he accepted the challenge

because one of his teachers, Louise Haar-Chapman, encouraged him to join the training program with other RHS students.

“When I first started training I was deathly afraid that in four months I’d be running 13.1 miles because during my first run I could barely get through two.”

His training helped him feel prepared on race day.

“You’re running with a big river of people,” he says. “The whole event kept me wanting to keep going.”

His drive to achieve at higher levels stems from the positive reinforcement he’s always received from his teachers.

“Any part of my personality has been partially shaped by my time here,” says Huntington. “I’ve had teachers who have pushed me to do my best and keep going at it, whether or not I really felt up to it.”

In addition to Haar-Chapman, who Huntington says helped him become a better writer, several other teachers stand out in shaping his journey through Ritenour: Karen Worland at Wyland Elementary, Margaret Herb at Ritenour Middle and Patrick Quinn at RHS.

Building relationships with teachers is what Huntington considers his best memories about high school.

“I’ve liked that I could have more mature relationships with my teachers,” he says. “Here, I feel like a student but am respected for what I can do.”

Meet Ioana Baiatu

Ritenour Career: *Marvin Elementary, Ritenour Middle, Ritenour High School*

Upcoming College Career: *Purdue University with plans to study math and business*

Vivid memories surface as Baiatu recalls the day when she was 10 years old and her mother told her that she and her two sisters would be moving in a week from Romania to the United States.

“It was definitely very scary,” said Baiatu. “I was shy as a child. Although I couldn’t speak English, I could understand it and read it.”

Already shy and self-conscious of being an immigrant who did not speak

English well made adjusting to Marvin difficult.

“It took me about two years to start talking to people,” she says.

Slowly, Baiatu came out of her shell as she made friends in seventh grade and began feeling more comfortable talking to them.

Once Baiatu reached Ritenour High School, she began immersing herself in classes she loves: engineering classes through Project Lead the Way, French and higher level math classes.

Baiatu’s interest in engineering stemmed from her fascination of her father’s job as a civil engineer in Romania.

“My engineering classes in high school taught me a lot more about what my father has to do,” she says.

Baiatu’s zeal for French was fueled by one of her favorite teachers, Susan Scott, who retired in June 2012.

“She really helped me speak better,” says Baiatu. “Her class was the highlight of my day.”

Beyond the academics, Baiatu says she learned valuable life lessons during her Ritenour career.

“I’ve learned a lot about time management and to ask for help and not be afraid to be wrong,” she says.

While in high school, Baiatu has immersed herself in student organizations, including Project Lead the Way competitions, Anime Club, Gay-Straight Alliance and Mu Alpha Theta (math club).

Not quite as shy as she once was and more confident in her speaking skills, Baiatu stood in front of more than 4,000 people at graduation and gave the valedictorian address to her classmates. She quipped at the beginning of her speech a still familiar feeling.

“Had I known in 2009 that I might be standing here today as your valedictorian, I may have been tempted not to try so hard! Stage fright notwithstanding, I am greatly honored by this privilege and I hope that I can do it justice.”

By the loud applause she received, it was apparent that she achieved her goal.



Top to bottom: Seth Huntington and Ioana Baiatu