

## 'Super Bowl' moments

### Seniors at APA, AHS surprised with Lilly Endowment Community scholarships

**ANDY KNIGHT**

THE HERALD BULLETIN

ANDERSON — Two local high school seniors were given news Wednesday that will let them chart their academic and vocational futures in what officials called life-changing ways.

In separate surprise ceremonies at each of their schools, Anderson Preparatory Academy's Vanessa McNeal and Anderson High School's Ryan Mason received certificates declaring their status as newly minted Lilly Endowment Community Scholars.

The scholarships, given by the Madison County Community Foundation, provide full tuition, required fees and a stipend of up to \$900 a year for books and other needed equipment for four years.

"These two recipients are great representatives of Madison County, and I have no doubt they will be successful in their post-secondary education careers and beyond," said Kari Sisk, vice president of programs for the county foundation.

McNeal said her scholarship will be invaluable as she begins her studies this fall at Hanover College. She plans to become a forensic psychologist, adding that a degree in that field often requires more than four years of schooling.

"I have to get my doctorate, so I have to go through a lot of school," McNeal said. "To have the first four years paid off is just amazing."

Mason, who plans to study business and marketing as well as computer science at either Butler, Purdue or IUPUI, said having the bulk of her

honoree in the county, is also the first recipient from Anderson High School since 2008.

"To be able to have this opportunity, what (McNeal) is going to do in the world and now to not have any restriction on achieving that potential, is incredible," said APA Superintendent Jill Barker.

"No matter what walk of life your kids go into, to know that they are going to be successful, and you've done everything you can to help them get there, no matter how small, and to see this, it's just a Super Bowl moment."

Terri Wilson, a college and career counselor at AHS, said Mason had to be gently coaxed into starting the application process, but as they prepared for her finalist interview in October, she was convinced Mason would do well.

"She owns a room when she walks into it," Wilson said. "I always said she either needs to become a salesperson of some sort or she needs to be a politician because she has my vote, and I'm buying whatever she's selling. She has that charisma about her that draws people in."

Sisk and Madison County Community Foundation President Ben Davis told McNeal and Mason that, as Lilly Endowment Scholarship recipients, they would be eligible for full-time enrollment at any public or private university in Indiana.

Optional inclusion in study abroad programs and participation in leadership programs on their campuses will also be supported by grants connected to the scholarships.



#### With family present, Anderson High School's Ryan Mason

was surprised Wednesday when told she was a Lilly Endowment Community Scholar. Her sister Ryland Mason (seated) and parents, Laketta and Ryan Mason (not pictured), looked on as Madison County Community Foundation members gave Mason the news at school.

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**In a surprise ceremony** at Anderson Preparatory Academy, senior Vanessa McNeal, center, receives a certificate from Kari Sisk with Madison County Community Foundation, and flowers and balloons from Tressena Jones with HAALO Foundation. McNeal was awarded a Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship, which was announced at a student convocation Wednesday.

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undergraduate education paid for lifts a large weight off her shoulders.

“The only word I can think of right now is, ‘Wow,’” she said. “I know this year I’ve definitely been really stressed with schools and scholarships, and it’s like, I personally don’t want to have to deal with student debt and stuff because that’s a lot of work.”

Educators at both schools expressed elation with the girls’ accomplishments. McNeal is APA’s first Lilly Endowment recipient since 2015, while Mason, in addition to being the scholarship’s first Black

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