



Woodstock Community Unit School District 200

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Contact: Kevin Lyons

815.337.3071

Thunder twins named National Merit Scholarship Finalists

Woodstock North High School seniors Joseph and Robert Gerloff might share a birthday and many other things, but these Thunder twins each have their own remarkable intellects.

The Gerloffs learned on Feb. 16 that both are finalists in the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program. More than 1.3 million juniors entered the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2022 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, which served as an initial screen of program entrants.

The nationwide pool of 16,000 semifinalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors, includes the highest-scoring entrants in each state.

The Gerloffs earned semi-finalist status in September and demonstrated their high academic performance to make the cut to the finalist round.

Over the spring and summer, about half of the finalists will become National Merit Scholarship winners.

"Thunder nation is really proud of the efforts that Joseph and Robert have put in over these four years. They've both been great models of academic excellence," WNHS Principal Josh Segura said.

Both boys are still undecided on which college they plan to attend next year, but both are confident about what they'd like to study.

"I think I'm going to go into some mathematics-adjacent field and major in that," said Robert, who plays baseball for the Thunder. "It would be pretty interesting to get into a field like sports analytics working with professional sports teams and analyzing the data."

Robert said he plans to stay in the Midwest and is considering the University of Illinois, University of Michigan, Michigan State and the University of Wisconsin.

Joseph, who has starred on the Thunder math and ACEs team, said Michigan State is his top choice at the moment, but he's also waiting to hear from Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Chicago.

"I'm planning on majoring in physics, and I do plan on going for a Ph.D.," he said.

The boys credited retired teacher Gigi Carlson as one the educators who pushed them along the way, particularly through the Challenge Corps gifted program in elementary and middle school.

Joseph mentioned Woodstock North history teacher Mickey Olhava as an important influence. "Here, definitely Mr. Olhava really stands out. I think a lot of kids would agree that he was a fun teacher who made them interested in school."

Robert said Mike Clarke, social studies department chairman, has been one of his key mentors at Woodstock North.

"Mr. Clarke has been my teacher for a couple of difficult classes, and he's coached me for three years in baseball. I've had a really good experience with him over the years," Robert said.

The Gerloffs share education as a family value and said they used to be somewhat academically competitive with each other in the lower grades.

"It's less so as we've gotten older. We have less of a desire to compete, because we've become a lot less similar over time. I think the drive to kind of outdo the other is kind of subsiding a bit." Robert said.

As high school seniors, the Gerloffs instead root for each other.

"Yeah, sure. I mean, he's my brother," Robert said.