

Academic All Stars: Sentinel celebrates graduating seniors in the performing arts



Dennis R.J. Geppert/The Holland Sentinel

From left Travis Ball, Kristin Baron, Vania Figueroa, Tessa Perez, Kelsey Miner, and Conner Mikula.

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Holland, MI —

Black River: Tessa Perez, singer

Daughter of David and Rayetta Perez

CREDITS: "I participate in choir at Black River and also sing

with the Black River Jazz Combo. I have won outstanding soloist awards at both the Western and Central Michigan jazz festivals. Outside of school, I sing and play guitar in band called Hats. We perform around Holland as a trio or quartet."

IN HER WORDS: "Collaborating with other musicians and listening to professionals (inspires me). For my classical music, I listen to Cecilia Bartoli, Leslie Feist is my folk idol, and my goddesses of jazz are Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday."

Fennville: Melissa Franklin, actor

Daughter of Tonya and Keith Adams

CREDITS: Choir President, Top Female Thespian Award, role of Ado Annie in "Oklahoma."

IN HER WORDS: "My inspiration in any form of performing I do is to make people smile. If I can sing a song that may not mean much to me, but it touches an audience member and has made their day, then I know I've done my job. It's the way I've found to help people. The feeling I get when I've made someone's day by either singing or acting is completely unexplainable by words, and I wouldn't trade it for the world. That feeling is the only inspiration I need, even though my choir director, mom and Jennifer Holiday are also great sources of inspiration.

Holland Christian: Kristin Baron, all-around musician

Parents: Lauren and Michele Baron

CREDITS: Orchestra, choir, Living Hope Singers, Jazz Band, fall musicals, theater, Dutch dance, music theory, chapel praise team, jazz combo, recipient of Hope College Presidential Merit Scholarship and Ruth Haidt Hughes Organ Scholarship.

IN HER WORDS: "There are some things in life that are just so inspirational and have such a big impact on your life that it is hard to put this meaning into words. Music is one of those things for me. I developed an early love for music when starting piano lessons in second grade, and have continued to expand and strengthen my passion and connection to music through various opportunities and possibilities that have come my way.

Holland: Vania Figueroa, actor, singer

Daughter of Nelson and Patricia Figueroa

CREDITS: Fall theater, forensics, competitive theater, Vocal Dimensions group.

IN HER WORDS: What I do is a passion and a love of mine. I have so much fun acting, dancing and singing and it helps with the activities I do. It keeps my day bright.

Saugatuck: Will Valentine, actor

Son of Carl and Aimee Valentine

CREDITS: National Honor Society, play production, A Christmas Carol cast member.

IN HIS WORDS: When I was young, I wanted to move off to Hollywood and become a famous actor. Even though today I've retired that dream, the young kid inside of me still wants to be in the spotlight.

West Ottawa: Connor Mikula, alto saxophone player

Son of Patrick and Carol Mikula

CREDITS: Central Michigan University Board of Trustees Elite Scholarship, Head Drum Major of West Ottawa High School Marching Band, winner of the 2010 Open Wind Division of Walgreen's National Concerto Competition, first-chair alto saxophonist of the 2010 Michigan School Band and Orchestra Association.

IN HIS WORDS: My work is what I love to do. Nobody is pressuring me to do this — I simply love the instrument. It defines my life. The saxophone isn't a hobby, it's just who I am and how I live. I cannot live without it.

Zeeland West: Kelsey Miner, dancer

Daughter of Doug and Christine Miner

School activities: Volleyball, track, cheerleading, dance ensemble, Zeeland Dance Program, Dutch Dance, student senate, National Honors Society, Business Professionals of America.

IN HER WORDS: I am inspired through my faith, parents support and my desire to help others. I also enjoy taking initiative in school classes and activities. My drive to succeed in school and college next year also helps my inspiration and my willingness to always give 100 percent.

Zeeland East: Travis Ball, actor, musician

Son of Tom and Colleen Ball

School activities: Band, Zeeland High Players (light design and programming); recipient of Norma Sneller Memorial Scholarship, Shelley Speet Mills Creative Arts Scholarship and the Dr. J.H. Kamps/Louis Roberts Speech Award.

IN HIS WORDS: As a member of the band and the Zeeland High Players, my inspiration comes from the desire to put on the best performance or show possible. I then work hard, sometimes for long hours after everyone has gone home, to meet my goals and then exceed them. Putting on a performance of any type is when I can unveil my hard work so that the community can come and enjoy it as entertainment.

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