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Comments (0)

## Kennewick student earns \$25,000 scholarship

By Sara Schilling, Herald staff writer

Akshai Baskaran is only a sophomore in high school, but he already has an idea of what he'd like to study in college -- engineering.

He now has a \$25,000 scholarship to help him cover tuition once he gets there.

The 16-year-old from Kennewick High School is the first student from Washington to ever earn the top Distinguished Award scholarship from the EnergySolutions Foundation.

He learned of the honor during class Wednesday, when school leaders and Energy-Solutions representatives surprised him.

"It was overwhelming," he said. "(But) I'm happy."

The foundation promotes math, science and engineering education. It awards \$2,000 college scholarships to top sophomores from schools in several states each year.

Those students are then considered for the three Distinguished Awards, which are for \$2,500, \$5,000 and \$25,000.

Rebecca Hu, a sophomore at Hanford High in Richland, won the \$5,000 award. A student from Tennessee was picked for the \$2,500 award.

"It's beyond exciting" that Tri-City students earned two of the top three awards, said Carla Hages, a spokeswoman for EnergySolutions.

The nuclear services company is based in Utah but has offices in Richland.

The scholarships are given to 10th-graders as a way to keep them motivated and interested in math, science and engineering through high school. Students have to maintain their grades to keep the scholarships, which are to be used toward degrees in scientific fields.

Akshai is the son of Chitra Sivaraman and Suresh Baskaran.

He's in the rigorous International Baccalaureate program at Kennewick High, and also manages a full schedule of extracurricular activities.

He made the varsity tennis team as a freshman, is on the school's successful Knowledge Bowl team and has been to several states competing in science fairs.

In a recent science project, he explored how to make biofuel from algae.

Akshai hasn't yet decided which college he wants to attend. He's also not sure exactly what he wants to do for a career, though he hopes to use his science skills to help with global problems, such as the climate crisis.

He said he's attracted to the sciences because, "I want to work in a field where you're really needed and your work is really important."

Six other students from the Tri-City area won \$2,000 scholarships from the foundation.

They are: Alyssa Hope, Columbia High School in Burbank; Collin Bampton, Kamiakin High in Kennewick; Shelley Johnson, Pasco High; Joanna Chen, Richland High; Billy Birge, River View High in Finley; and Sierra Sonerman, Southridge High in Kennewick.

All the students will be honored at 6 p.m. May 19 at a banquet at Shilo Inn in Richland.