

# The Kids Are All Right

*A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (5/24/2011)*

Sometimes it seems like the older you get, the more you worry about ‘kids these days’. You don’t understand their music or their fascination with tattoos or piercings. You worry that they’ve never experienced really tough times, that they spend too much time with electronics, and that they’re not ready to take over and lead our economy, or more importantly, our country. Well, you can stop worrying...the kids are all right and the future looks bright.

I know this because I just had the opportunity to serve on the Centennial High School Scholarship Selection Committee. I read and scored 162 applications by seniors looking for financial aid to help pay for the ever-increasing cost of college. Reviewing each one to learn about their grades, school activities, community activities and reading their essays took me over 20 hours of volunteer time. As I got started, my initial thought was ‘what did I get myself into this time?’ But as I continued reading, I came to feel lucky to be a part of such an important and huge undertaking, and to get to know a little about the students that our school district and communities have prepared to send off to college and adulthood. By the time I finished my work and made some awfully tough choices for limited scholarship dollars, I realized that the Centennial High School Class of 2011 has the talent, the compassion, and the drive to make our communities and our country better and stronger.

What did I learn from being on the Scholarship Committee?

**These kids are smart!** They earn ‘A’s’ in classes that are tougher than the ones I took in college, much less high school. They tackle learning full speed, they are disciplined, and they work hard at getting good grades.

**These kids are also involved in school.** Almost all of the applicants are getting these great grades while being actively involved in music, sports, drama, robotics, peer leadership, mentoring elementary school kids, and much, much more. They are well-rounded.

**These kids also help their community.** They aren’t selfish and they understand they have been given gifts and opportunities that others don’t have. At a young age, they already understand the importance of giving back better than many of the successful adults in our community. They are active in their church, they help out at hospitals and nursing homes, at Feed My Starving Children and local food shelves, they coach younger kids and serve as role models – the list goes on and on.

**These kids have had a wide range of experiences.** Yes, there are kids who come from wonderful families with lots of money and support. But from reading their essays I’ve learned about kids who are getting great grades and finding success when they’ve gone through worse times than I can ever imagine. Some of the kids have been victims of sexual abuse, are homeless, or have seen their families crumble around them and yet have persevered. In fact, more than persevered, they’ve somehow thrived! Imagine the mental toughness, the courage, the resiliency to face times like that at the age of 17! I’ll tell you a secret – I cried when I read some of the stories, and I was angry that adults would put kids in harm’s way. But mostly I was in awe of the tremendous kids in our community and realized that we adults have to do a better job of supporting the kids in our schools.

Seniors, I want to thank you for everything you have already done and can’t wait to see what you do next!