

SUPER NOVANS



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Woonsocket High School's top two students, Matthew Cusson and Mandolyn Holliday, are excited to represent Woonsocket at prestigious colleges out of state in the fall.

Woonsocket High's top students look forward to new opportunities

By **STELLA LORENCE**
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WOONSOCKET – Woonsocket High School's top two students, Matthew Cusson and Mandolyn Holliday, are excited to represent Woonsocket at prestigious colleges out of state in the fall.

"The diversity has made me grow so much as a person and that's a part of me that will never go away," Cusson, the valedictorian, said.

Cusson will be attending Harvard with plans to study either economics or engineering, and Hol-

liday will attend Georgia Tech on a full tuition scholarship to study mechanical engineering.

Cusson, the son of Mark Cusson and Linda Wojcik, has attended Woonsocket schools since kindergarten and carved a path this year as the first student representative to the School Committee. He's been attending committee meetings and giving reports to the members since the beginning of the school year.

"It's really fascinating hearing a lot of the behind the scenes details," he said.

As the inaugural student representative, he's had to figure out

some parts of the role as he goes, he said, but his main goal has been to help bridge the gap between the student population and the School Committee by reaching out to different groups of students to compile his reports.

He advised his successor to the role to "keep an open mindset, value the opinions of others and just remember that [the committee members] are there for a reason."

Holliday, grandchild of Letha and Nathaniel Holliday, came to Woonsocket as a freshman in high

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school during the pandemic and initially struggled to find a sense of community when classes were fully remote. Once hybrid classes started and she had the chance to meet her class-

mates in person, "it was easy to make friends and form that community," she said.

One of her fondest memories from high school is the class potlucks around the holidays or end of the school year, Holliday said. The potlucks came together because everyone in the

class was friends with each other, and they were student-organized.

"I always bring banana pudding," she said.

Cusson said he enjoyed the music department's trip to New York City last year to see a Broadway performance of the musical "Wicked." Though he en-



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joyed the experience personally, he said the trip also encapsulates the school as a whole.

"A lot of the time, Woonsocket gets a bad rap and that can hinder some of the students," he said. "With the right opportunities and resources, we can succeed in the big world."

Cusson and Holliday both cultivated a long resume of school and community commitments, including some shared involvement in band, the math and science club "SMILE" and theater. Holliday is an assistant stage manager, and Cusson will

be debuting on stage in the role of "Lumiere" later this month for the WHS production of "Beauty and the Beast" - he's "a little nervous" but "it's been the highlight of the year."

Even with all her involvement and recognitions, Holliday said her proudest high school achievement is her admission to Georgia Tech and her receipt of the school's Clark Scholars Program Scholarship. She was at work when she found out she was accepted and said it took a second for it to sink in that she'd been admitted to one of the top schools

for her area of study.

"I was like, 'Oh my god,'" she said. "There's nothing I could've done better. I feel like I'm going to be successful. I can't hold back on myself."

Cusson said he's been most proud of "seeing some of the positive change" he's been able to create at school and the impact on students through his roles as student representative and class president.

"We're extremely proud of these two," Principal Brian Ernest said.

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