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GREENLIGHT



Dear high school seniors ...

BY **JEFF VONKAENEL** / jeffv@newsreview.com

In a few very short months, nearly all of you will be experiencing one of life's most important milestones—leaving high school and going out into the world of work and college. Congratulations!

But before you go, we have a favor to ask those of you who put your heart and soul into your college essay. Could you please send it to us?

There will be some prize money and some fame, for those of you whose essays are selected for publication in the Sacramento News & Review. One of you will be on the cover of this newspaper! But I am not asking you to submit your essay for your benefit. I am asking you to send us your essay for the benefit of the rest of us.

This will be the 10th year that SN&R has dedicated an issue to Sacramento high school students' college essays. We publish about 10 essays in print and post more online.

The challenges faced by many of these young essayists have been daunting: overcoming autism, the death of a parent, being of mixed race, experiencing poverty, escaping war to come to the United States, being gay, facing bullies, living with an abusive parent ... and much more. Their stories take us to places we haven't been, or perhaps remind us of experiences we had when we were younger. The stories are moving and so real. And through them the human spirit shines brightly, with hope for a better future.

Each year, when I read the college essay issue and then meet the students who wrote these essays, I feel energized. I feel more willing to take on the everyday challenges of life and the struggle to deal with global warming, political polarization, income inequality and all the rest.

I am reminded that my generation has a long way to go if we want to leave a better world for these students. But their hope and optimism is contagious.

The idea for our college essay contest came from my watching my daughter, Natasha, spend so much time and energy crafting her college essay. The questions were designed to capture her essence. And she used the opportunity to think deeply about herself. Her essay went through many revisions.

Reading her essay, I was struck by how seriously she thought about things and how insightful her perspective was. I became even more proud of my daughter. I thought her essay deserved a wider audience. And I realized that every year there would be thousands of Sacramento

high school seniors whose essays deserved to be read by more

people than just their parents and the bleary-eyed college review committee members.

So in 2010, we launched our first college essay contest. And we're happy to announce that we're continuing this tradition again this year.

The rules are simple. All

Sacramento-area high school seniors graduating this year are eligible. The essays need to be no longer than 650 words. Students should send their essays as a Word document, a PDF or in the body of an email to collegeessay@newsreview.com with the subject line "College Essay Contest." The deadline is Tuesday, May 7 at 5 p.m.

So, high school students, please send us your essay. Think of it as a community service project. □

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Jeff vonKaenel is the president, CEO and majority owner of the News & Review.