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MEDIA RELEASE

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Winnetonka Senior Wins Gates Millennium Scholarship

KANSAS CITY—NORTH ... Winnetonka High School senior Mariam Latifzai almost chose not to apply for the **Gates Millennium Scholarship**. Two of her three older brothers had applied and had never received the letter advising them they qualified for the second stage of competition. For Mariam Latifzai, that letter arrived in April.

Her acceptance letter from the Gates Millennium Scholars program came May 11. Latifzai remembers it well because it was the same day she learned she had been accepted into the six-year, combined baccalaureate and medical degree program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). As a Gates Millennium Scholar, she will have all expenses paid through the six-year medical program. The program even pays for a doctorate, should she choose to earn one.

Latifzai, who at age three came with her family from Afghanistan, has been at Winnetonka High School for the past four years of her education. She graduates this

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NORTH
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SCHOOLS

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MEDIA RELEASE

Page 2 of 3

Thursday wearing the gold cord of a Gold Medallion Honors graduate, the diploma that she earned taking a rigorous course of study – challenge courses, performing community service, taking a summer internship, and producing a senior exhibition and student portfolio. It was the Gold Medallion school-to-career internship that was key in moving her career consideration from business administration to the field of medicine.

“I was somewhat interested in medicine because of an older brother who graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia and is in medical school at Dartmouth,” said Latifzai, “but it was the life-altering experience I had last summer while interning in the emergency room at North Kansas City Hospital that made me sure this was what I wanted.”

As she job shadowed – running blood to the lab and remaking beds in the E.R. – Latifzai was encouraged by Dr. Jack Stauffer to enroll in the UMKC medical program, which she begins in the fall. Though she has yet to learn the full extent of the financial aid being a Gates Millennium Scholar offers, she does know that tuition at the UMKC medical program is about \$35,000 a year.

With graduation only days away and a test this week for a class she is taking through June, Latifzai has had little time to dwell on her good fortune. On Thursday morning, while her classmates practice their march to “Pomp and Circumstance” for evening graduation ceremonies, Mariam Latifzai will be taking a chemistry exam at UMKC.

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Page 3 of 3

Latifzai is currently treasurer of the Winnetonka Chapter of National Honor Society and recently placed at state for an original oratory in the National Forensics League competition.

She is the daughter of Hawa and Mohammad Latifzai of Pleasant Valley.

The Gates Millennium Scholars program is funded by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that awards highly motivated and talented minority students the opportunity to attend college without the burden of tuition. The scholars program has been in place since 1999 and continues through 2019 when the \$1 billion initiative will have helped more than 20,000 students realize their academic dreams.

For more information on Mariam Latifzai or the Gold Medallion Honors diploma, contact **Dr. Harold Condra**, principal of **Winnetonka High School**, at **(816) 413-5500**.

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