



## Flying high

### AAE students earn prestigious aeronautical scholarships

BY DAVIDA SIWISA JAMES FOR THE DAILY PRESS

**APPLE VALLEY** • This is the time of year when many students receive college admission letters — but most of them don't require a congressional recommendation.

Four seniors at the Academy for Academic Excellence at the Lewis Center for Educational Research have earned prestigious military scholarships after an application process that took almost a year and a half.

Twin sisters Cori and Dena McFadden have been accepted into the Air Force Academy with full scholarships. Their classmates Kyle Rodriguez and Ashley Bergstrom each received a Type 2 ROTC Air Force Scholarship that awards them \$18,000 a year toward tuition, a monthly stipend and a generous amount toward textbooks.

All four are members of the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps program at AAE.

"I would like to be a pilot and my sister Cori would like to be a flight surgeon," Dena McFadden said. "I knew I wanted to go into the Air Force in about seventh grade."

Their mom said that in kindergarten the girls knew the words to the songs for every branch of the military. A talk about the Air Force by the commander of the JROTC program sealed Dena McFadden's decision about which branch to join.

The Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., is four years, and the scholarships come with a duty to serve after graduation, but the twins both plan to make a career in the military.

"We will owe five years of service after we graduate, and Kyle and Ashley will owe four," Dena McFadden explained.

"When I was little, I wanted to be an Army doctor because I loved 'M\*A\*S\*H,'" Cori McFadden said. "I decided that the Air Force was the best for me and how I want my college experience to go. I was just thrilled and over the moon when I found out I got in."

Cori McFadden wants to be a surgeon and hopes to be admitted to the Air Force's elite medical school.

"I'd like to do medevac (medical evacuation)," Cori McFadden said. "So I'd be in charge of taking the wounded from the field immediately, making sure they are stable, and taking them back to a base where they can be operated on."

Rodriguez and Bergstrom have been friends since second grade.

Bergstrom, who also was accepted to USC, has an additional scholarship from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Arizona to cover the balance of her tuition. Embry is considered one of the top aeronautical universities in the country.

She has had her pilot's license since summer and has already flown her mom over the Grand Canyon.

"When I went to Embry, that was one of my top choices," Bergstrom said. "It's a really good engineering school. I want to fly helicopters if I (become a) pilot."

Bergstrom also wants to become an aerospace engineer, but she is not quite as settled as the twins on whether she will build a career in the Air Force.

Rodriguez will be using his scholarship to attend California Baptist University in Riverside.

"I plan on majoring in civil engineering," Rodriguez said. "The Type 7 scholarship doesn't pay for the first year in a private school. So when I got the Type 2 award, it opened up the possibility of me being able to attend a private school."

The four friends and their parents took turns explaining that in addition to good grades, letters of recommendation and community service, an ROTC scholarship application must be accompanied by the recommendation from either a member of Congress, the vice president or the president of the United States. The students undergo a heightened level of scrutiny that includes an extensive security background check.

"It's not enough if the academy wants you," Dena McFarland said. "A member of Congress has to say yes."

Former Congressman Jerry Lewis nominated all four students, which opened the door for the twins' acceptance to the Air Force Academy and each of the students receiving the ROTC scholarships.

Bergstrom and Dena McFadden also are co-valedictorians of their graduating class.



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Four students from the Academy of Academic Excellence, from left, Kyle Rodriguez, Dena McFadden, Cori McFadden and Ashley Bergstrom, have all received some type of scholarship from the Air Force.