

WHS alumni receive Zephyr awards

By MARY FRANCES FRABOTTA
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Zephyrs from multiple generations came together to be recognized April 19.

The Whitehall-Coplay School District recognized the 2012 Zephyr Graduates of Distinction and inducted new members into the National Honor Society during the evening's event.

Honor society President Lukasz Gjondia opened the induction ceremony by reminding the 2012 inductees that the truth must be held firm and, "Life is the symbol of truth."

The excitement mounted as Dr. Barbara Chomik, director of curriculum and instruction, took the podium to announce the Graduates of Distinction — Rogers W. Vaughn, Peter Stimeling PWS-ssg, Joseph G. McDonald, Anthony E. Vlahovic and Matthew R. Yudt, Ph.D.

The five were honored for distinguishing themselves with personal and professional achievements which, in turn, have made contributions to society and to the individual's field of endeavor, and for their significant contributions to community service and the arts.

Rogers W. Vaughn, a member of the WHS Class of 1949, went on to the University of Pennsylvania to earn an AB in business and journalism. Vaughn served in the U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps and held a variety of worldwide leadership positions with Dupont Corp and was president of the West Chester School District Board of Directors for six years. During his tenure, Vaughn improved educational needs through the restructuring of high schools.

Peter Stimeling, a member of the WHS Class of 1968, went on to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts to earn a PFA Certificate of Fine Arts. Stimeling is an internationally acclaimed watercolorist and has been awarded membership to the Pennsylvania Watercolor Society. He also received the Sylvan Guild Award. Stimeling's portraits have been featured in American Artist Magazine. He is a self-employed fine artist and portrait painter.

Joseph G. McDonald, a member of the WHS Class of 1970, went on to Indiana University of Pennsylvania to earn a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's in learning resources. McDonald is a professional photographer for the National Wildlife Federation and has published seven books. He con-



PRESS PHOTO BY MARY FRANCES FRABOTTA

Whitehall High School 2012 Zephyr Graduates of Distinction Award recipients are, from left, Matthew R. Yudt, Ph.D., Class of 1986; Anthony E. Vlahovic, Class of 1978; Joseph G. McDonald, Class of 1970; Peter Stimeling PWS-ssg, Class of 1968; and Rogers W. Vaughn, Class of 1949.

ducts photo tours and safaris around the globe. McDonald taught biology, zoology and general science in the Whitehall-Coplay School District for six years.

Anthony E. Vlahovic, a member of the WHS Class of 1978, went on to Wilkes and West Chester University to earn a bachelor's and master's in psychology. Vlahovic became a professional baseball player for the Boston Red Sox. After experiencing a personal tragedy, Vlahovic became the founder and president of Bodylines, Wellness/Fitness Plus and Momentum Fitness Center, specializing in rehab programs for disabled and cancer patients.

Matthew R. Yudt, a member of the WHS Class of 1986, went on to Penn State University to earn a bachelor's in chemistry and to the University of Rochester to earn a master's and Ph.D. in biophysics. Yudt wanted to be a scientist since the first grade. He later fulfilled his destiny by conceiving, initiating and leading drug discovery teams at all levels of preclinical for women's health. He evaluates development in disease areas and initiates drug discovery projects. "It is the hope that their success stories will serve as an inspiration to all of our students," said Chomik, "especially to the Whitehall High School students being inducted into the National Honor Society this evening."

The Whitehall-Coplay School Board and the awards committee worked hand in hand with the National Honor Society this year to bring together their most talented alumni and students. It was a perfect fit as both groups of inductees must demonstrate not only academic accomplishments, but also exude leadership, character and service to their com-

munity. As each graduate of distinction received his award, his message to the NHS inductees was clear: you can achieve a dream or accomplish any goal you desire when "passion is part of every emotion ... when you believe in and pursue a good education ... that you convey optimism and have imagination ... never be afraid of failure ... embrace change and never give up ... don't ever give up."

"Don't ever take for granted what these fine individuals have accomplished," Superintendent John W. Corby told the honor society students. "Nothing was ever handed to them and their successes were a result of hard work and dedication."

The WCSD has been recognizing graduates who have distinguished themselves athletically in the "Hall of Fame." But Joyce Wheeler, school board member, wanted to expand the awards program and honor other forms of success people had attained.

"We are an education system and Joyce saw the need to recognize and show equal importance to any form of success our graduates attained, not just athletically, but academically," said Chomik.

Wheeler became the driving force behind that expansion. Using the concept from an awards program from her own high school, she wanted to use graduates' success stories to inspire other students.

In 2000, The Arts Hall of Fame was established.

Inducting three WHS graduates, this awards program recognized accomplishments of alumni in the arts area only. As co-chair of the steering committee, Wheeler continued to work with school board members and by 2010 the award program was expanded. The Zephyr Graduates of Distinction Award was established to recognize graduates who have achieved significantly in the academics; music; the arts; civic or military service; community service; and personally.

The Graduates of Distinction Award Program is in its second year. In 2011, there were five inductees, three of whom distinguished themselves in their medical careers and two were recognized for exemplary military service.

The steering committee has since recommended the recipients of The Arts Hall of Fame become honorary members of the Zephyr Graduates of Distinction, for a total of 13 inductees to date.

If you know of any graduates who have achieved significant accomplishments listed in the Zephyr Graduates of Distinction Award program, the school district is interested in hearing from you. Forms are available at the Whitehall Township Public Library, Coplay Public Library, the school district website and by contacting Chomik at 610-439-1431, ext. 1021.