

Salute to the Class of 2009

District 23 is a better place because of our students' outstanding contributions to academics, arts, and athletics. Providing them with many diverse opportunities prepares them for high school and gives them the tools to succeed. Here eight MacArthur Middle School eighth graders share their accomplishments and special memories. Congratulations!

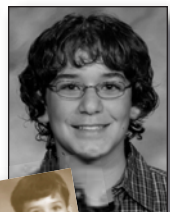


Darby Dammeier

If grades were given for personality, Darby Dammeier would get an A+. "I get that from my dad," she said. "He's a really funny guy. He's always telling stories that make everyone laugh." She'll never forget when he took the day off work to come to school on her birthday. "He did a juggling show while we ate cake. He's a great dad."

Darby is quick to give kudos to her mom, too. "My mom is equally as wonderful. She helps me with all my homework." Darby also has earned plenty of A's in academics. Her teachers view her as polite, respectful, conscientious, self-motivated, and a hard worker. She's stayed on the Honor Roll all three years and expects to continue in Spanish at Wheeling High School. If she had to pick a favorite subject, it would probably be reading. It's how she spends a lot of her free time; she especially likes fantasy. All the sword fighting in the book *Eragon* inspired her to try fencing. She took lessons for three years. "Turned out, I was pretty good at it," she said. Admittedly competitive, you can't talk about Darby without mentioning athletics. At Mac, she ran track in sixth and seventh grades and cross country all three years. She also played basketball in seventh and eighth grades. And, she played soccer from kindergarten until last year. Darby plays the flute in both band and orchestra. "It's a lot of fun," she said. "I couldn't ask for better directors. Mr. Thomas is wonderful and Mrs. Berge is too." She will be going on to marching band at Wheeling. Darby volunteered to be student director of this year's musical. She'd like to do crew in high school.

Darby loved being at Ross and Sullivan and will always remember meeting all the kids coming from Ike in sixth grade. She is not sure what to expect in high school. "I do know that I'm a little bit terrified to go," she said. "It's really hard to leave behind what you know well but I think I know what I have to know."



Matt Lebherz

Matt Lebherz is focused on the future but has some great memories from the past that influenced who he is today. It all began in kindergarten at Betsy Ross where he remembers finger painting and the class pet newt. He was able to take it home, feed it, and watch it swim around. Matt's first- and second-grade teacher,

Mrs. Bennett, had a strong impact on him and taught him how to be a good student. "She was an awesome teacher," said Matt. "She was strict but I learned some very good study habits."

Mac is a positive learning environment for Matt. As he puts it, "The teachers make the school what it is." They have some good things to say about him, too: He enjoys a challenge and works very attentively and determinedly on all his projects. He is open minded to suggestions and ideas, readily available to help others with their work, and always yearning to learn more. Matt is an honor student and really enjoys Spanish a lot, especially with Mrs. Kalaras. His favorite subject is science and he is considering aeronautics as a course of study in the future. "I want to be a pilot." Matt also excels in music. He plays clarinet in the band and will start practicing for marching band at Hersey High School this summer. He is learning saxophone from a Hersey Junior. "Sometimes we talk about what high school will be like," said Matt. "I know I'll be growing up and taking on more responsibility but you can still be a kid at heart." Matt is a Boy Scout and has been giving a lot of thought to his Eagle project. He's also thinking about football. "I'm not that big into sports," he said, "but I'm interested in playing football. I'm up for everything."



Garret Matchen

Being successful comes naturally to Garret Matchen. He takes it all in stride. He says what he does are just "simple things" that are easy for him. His teachers see him as a model eighth grader for all students of the school to emulate. Garret says he stays positive and doesn't goof off. His teachers would probably say he's

being modest or maybe he doesn't realize what joy his perpetual smile and enthusiastic attitude bring, not only to them, but to his peers. His determination, strong work ethic, conscientiousness, and dedication to learning make him a pleasure to be around. He brings an excellent quality to all his work, excels in all his classes, and is a member of the Honor Society.

Garret is the youngest of three boys. He went to kindergarten at Eisenhower School and has great memories of the World of Work project in fifth grade. He managed the class store and learned a lot both making money and spending it in the simulated town. He enjoyed his time at Mac, too, especially lunch when he could socialize with his friends. He liked his teachers and thought they were nice to the kids. Most of his friends went to Eisenhower and, happily, will be going on to Hersey High School with him. Garret's sure he'll have more homework there and the teachers will be a little harder on him, but he's confident he's prepared for the challenge, especially math. After all, he comes by it naturally. His mother is good at math and one of his brothers is a Senior in the engineering program at Purdue University. Garret easily grasped the concepts and is really good at it. "I hope to get to calculus in high school," he said.

Garret enjoyed Spanish at Mac and will continue in high school. He also likes running and was in track and field. And, he's been an avid hockey player for the last nine years and practices two or three times a week after school and on weekends. Look for Garret to be playing for Hersey in the fall.



Kelsey Nicpon

She's got spirit; she's got heart, and, starting this fall, Kelsey Nicpon will take all the right moves to the pom squad at Wheeling High School. She'll perform for both football and basketball games -- quite an achievement for a freshman to be part of both! Her experience with poms at Mac served her well. But it was not just about

learning the routines. As Captain of the squad the past two years, Kelsey's had a crash course in leadership, responsibility, and motivation. How do you get a group of Middle School girls to listen and learn? "It was hard," said Kelsey, "especially with all my friends on the squad." Kelsey found a strategy and kept it fun by making up games -- some of them on the spot -- to keep the girls focused and on task. Because she is kind and fair, Kelsey gained the respect of both teachers and peers. Soccer is another passion of Kelsey's. She's played on the Aces Elite travel team and, not surprisingly, participated in the leadership program assisting the coaches. "I helped the younger kids feel better about themselves and enjoy soccer more," said Kelsey. She hopes to play soccer at Wheeling, too. She's had a great time in track at Mac but the meets sometimes conflict with her soccer games. Kelsey also played on the volleyball team in seventh grade and has been in the choir for three years.

Academics are important to Kelsey, too. She's been on the Honor Roll the past two years. Her teachers know she is motivated to do her best and achieve her potential. Language Arts is her favorite subject and she's looking forward to writing in high school. She takes Spanish at Mac and plans to continue at Wheeling. Kelsey says she learned a lot at Mac. "The teachers have been really helpful," she said. "I've improved so much and I've got to thank them for that."

Kelsey remembers her kindergarten days at Ross, her mom volunteering in the classroom, and her two best girlfriends being in her class. Her favorite year was in Mrs. MacTavish's fourth grade class. "I learned to be organized and show my true colors," said Kelsey. "I started doing well in school."



Kaitlyn Nielson

Kaitlyn Nielson discovered lots of creative outlets at Mac. She's done set design for the musical for the past three years and is in Art Club. This year she's been writing stories for the school newspaper and likes thinking of ideas for articles. "We interviewed the teachers about what music, movies, and books

they liked when they were our age," she said. "Because they are all different ages, we got a lot of different answers." Kaitlyn plays oboe in both the band and orchestra. She takes private lessons every two weeks and has even started to make her own reeds. She loves dance and has taken lessons through Arlington Heights Park District every week for the past 11 years. "I like tap but I do some jazz," she said. "I'm in the recital every year."

With all her activities, Kaitlyn manages to excel in her studies and stay on the Honor Roll. She is matter-of-fact about this balancing act. "It works out somehow," she said. When she has some spare time, Kaitlyn likes to read and play with her dog, an eight-year-old, flat-coated retriever. Kaitlyn's teachers report that she is mature, respectful, cooperative, enthusiastic, and truly exemplifies the meaning of a Magnificent Marauder. Kaitlyn enjoyed her time at Mac and Eisenhower. She liked Mr. Mayer's fifth-grade class and the extra things he did to make the students think. Kaitlyn appreciates all the teachers who were available if she had problems and her friends who are always there for her. She's looking forward to meeting new people from other schools at Wheeling. She plans to continue in Spanish, play oboe in the band, join Orchesis, and try out for Color Guard. And even though her best friend will be going to Hersey, Kaitlyn can take comfort in the fact that she will have an older sister at Wheeling.



Vivek Shah

Vivek Shah reads a lot. In fact, he still holds the record at Sullivan School for the most Accelerated Reader points. He estimates that equates to around 300 books. He likes to read about everything but sports is his true passion -- whether it's reading about it, watching it, or playing it. "I love just about

every sport except golf. It's boring," he said. He plays basketball and volleyball at MacArthur. He plans to be a three-sport athlete at Hersey High School by adding football to the mix. He enjoys the camaraderie of playing on a team. "It makes you feel like you're part of something and brings us closer," he said. Vivek credits his dad with nurturing his love of basketball. In his spare time, Vivek enjoys going outside and shooting baskets. "I like being alone when I'm shooting. I find it easier to concentrate. I'm working on my free throws." Vivek's teachers think of him as a tremendous athlete and a wonderful student. They appreciate his enthusiasm on and off the court, his eagerness to learn, and his dry sense of humor. They say he is mature and respectful. Although Vivek considers math his best subject, he likes science more. "Math is more repetitive and I get bored of that," he said. "I find science more interesting." He is confident he'll be in Spanish II and all honors classes in high school. He's looking forward to getting involved in a lot more things. "It will be my home away from home, I'm pretty sure." Vivek doesn't remember a whole lot about his time at Ross but says Sullivan was "pretty awesome." The teachers really helped him. "Mrs. Yager in fourth grade was the most supportive teacher I've had."



Kristian Stoev

Talking to Kristian Stoev for just a few minutes will convince you that he's on the fast track to success. His teachers describe him as an extraordinary individual who strives for the best and always achieves it. Having emigrated from Bulgaria with his family, he spent his third through fifth grade years in

the Chicago Public Schools. He remembers it being very hard. "I didn't know very much," he said. "I like it here better." He found that at Mac the people are nicer, the teachers more understanding, and the environment better with many more opportunities.

Kristian likes everything about Mac. "I like the schedule and the teachers make it fun," he said. He also appreciates going outside for gym and having a big soccer field and running track. He'll always remember his eighth grade teachers, the kids, and the activities especially the field trip to Coko Keys Water Park. Kristian has found it easy to make friends at Mac. "People seem to like me," he said. "I got that from my dad."

Kristian's teachers say he excels in all his classes. The work he turns in is of quality and consistently completed at a high level of accuracy. He applies different approaches to resolving tasks and problems that require higher level thinking skills. Kristian is interested in computers and engineering. He admits to having a bit of spring fever when it comes to studying. "In winter, I pay more attention to it."

Every summer, Kristian and his family return to Bulgaria. This summer, he's staying home so he can attend soccer camp. He does miss Bulgaria, especially the mountains, and would like to move back some day.



Nicole Swiderski

This has been Nicole Swiderski's first and last year at MacArthur. She attended Bridge Elementary School in Chicago from kindergarten through seventh grade. Then her family moved to Arlington Heights. "I was so scared of coming here," she said. "It was hard."

What she found at Mac was a welcoming, friendly place. "I remember how people would come up and introduce themselves and ask me what school I came from." Even though she misses her old friends and tries to get back to the city to see them as often as possible, she's made a lot of friends at Mac. "Everyone is so nice here," she said. She also discovered that the kids at Mac are a lot like the kids at her old school. "Everyone is different, but overall, we're all teenagers." Nicole likes getting good grades and is on the Honor Roll. She enjoys all of her subjects in school and does well in them. Her teachers think she is an excellent student. Industrious and organized, she goes the extra mile to achieve her true potential. She plans to take four years of Spanish at Hersey High School. "I really want to learn the language," she said. "I have a lot of friends from Chicago who speak Spanish." She'll also be taking AP Human Geography and Honors Biology in the fall. She's looking forward to all the classes and activities in high school. "I love having so many opportunities but it makes it hard to decide what to do." Nicole has learned a lot in math and reading this year. "I love Mrs. Thomas. I think she's a really good teacher. She always explains things really well." ●

