

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

From Pottstown High School to Yale

First of two articles

Would you be surprised to know a recent graduate of Pottstown High School is attending Yale University — free?

It's true. Carissa Youse, Class of 2008, has successfully completed her freshman year at Yale and is now entering her sophomore year. Yale is consistently ranked with Harvard and Princeton as one of the top three universities in the nation.

Carissa received her entire public school education in Pottstown — kindergarten through 12th grade. She does not come from an affluent family. Carissa is the daughter of a single mother who has worked at a variety of blue-collar jobs. Carissa grew up in a modest second-floor apartment in a converted older home on Third Street, shared with her mother and three siblings.

Yale is one of the most expensive universities in the nation — nearly \$50,000 a year, including room and board. The total cost to Carissa, however, is just \$750 a year, which she can easily earn as research assistant at Yale, where she lives on campus year-round.

Yale is a “need-blind” university, which means if you are accepted, Yale will ensure money is not an obstacle to attending. Because Carissa comes from a low-income family, everything is paid for. No loans. She will graduate debt-free.

Carissa looks Anglo-Saxon, but her maternal grandfather is black. She said her diverse racial heritage was a plus on her application.

Nor was her acceptance at Yale a fluke. Carissa was also accepted at other elite colleges — Williams, Amherst, Rice, and Stanford. And she wasn't even first in her class in Pottstown. She ranked fourth.

So was she ready?

“I felt well prepared. The work at Yale is not much harder than at Pottstown High School,” she says. “It's just more in-depth and time-consuming. If you manage your time, you'll be fine.” In addition to a full course load, Carissa

writes theater reviews for the *Yale Daily News*, America's oldest college daily. (You can read them on the newspaper's Web site.)

Carissa said she decided she wanted to go to Yale in fourth grade, when Yale was just a nice-sounding name.

She credits her middle school gifted teacher, Danielle McCoy, for turning a vague ambition into a serious goal. And her determination and confidence were intensified by her high school gifted teacher, Greg Troutman, who routinely takes his students to visit Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

“It often feels surreal,” Carissa says. “Yale is everything I thought it would be. I feel lucky and grateful to the people who helped me get here.”

The Pottstown School District is the least fashionable of all the districts in the region. Yet Carissa — delightful and articulate — is living, breathing proof that Pottstown can pre-

pare bright, motivated students to succeed in the nation's most rigorous universities.

Moreover, if you want to educate your children for life in the real world, Pottstown has something no other area district can match—economic and racial diversity.

It's hard to imagine a more powerful message that Pottstown can and should broadcast to parents and the public.

But here's the sad part. The Pottstown School District doesn't know how to market itself. Despite having a full-time communications director, the district has not publicized Carissa's remarkable story, or success stories of other recent graduates.

The district boasts it receives tens of thousands of visits monthly on its Web site, but it fails to mention Carissa and Yale.

Regrettably, Pottstown doesn't even recognize and promote its own best assets.

Thomas Hylton, a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and 37-year resident of Pottstown, is Web site editor of Pottstown Citizens for Responsible Government.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

Summary

- **Carissa Youse, Pottstown High School Class of 2008, has successfully completed her freshman year at Yale University, one of the most rigorous academic institutions in the nation. She is now entering her sophomore year.**
- **Because Carissa comes from a low-income family and Yale is “need-blind,” she is receiving a \$200,000 education virtually free.**
- **Carissa is living, breathing proof the Pottstown School District can prepare bright, motivated students to succeed in the nation's top universities. But the district doesn't recognize and promote its own best assets.**