

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Pottstown teen enjoys unique education

Laighna Will lives just a block from the Pottstown High School—Middle School complex, but she's spent the last four years boarding at the Milton Hershey School in Dauphin County, the nation's wealthiest private school.

The school serves an exclusively low-income clientele in grades pre-K-12.

Earlier this month, Laighna graduated as an honor student with not only a high school degree, but \$95,000 in scholarship funds she can use at the college of her choice.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

There is nothing like the Milton Hershey School (MHS) anywhere.

Founded by chocolate maker Milton Hershey in 1909 to provide a free boarding school education for orphan white boys, the school has expanded to enroll students of all genders and races, from anywhere in the United States (although mostly from Pennsylvania), with the essential criteria for acceptance being financial need.

The school's endowment of \$15 billion exceeds all but a handful of universities like Harvard and Yale.

MHS covers all of the costs of medical, dental, and psychological care, housing, food, clothing, and extracurricular activities for each student. If the student has a good academic and conduct record, as Laighna did, he or she can leave school with a \$95,000 credit to use for college, technical school, or the world of work.

Laighna's parents split when she was young. She was living with her mother and having trouble at

Pottsgrove Middle School when her guidance counselor suggested looking into Milton Hershey. She was accepted for seventh grade, but almost as soon as she got there, she wanted to leave. After three months, she was hospitalized for depression. The next year, she attended classes at Spring-Ford's eighth grade center.

But everyone in her family wanted her to return to Hershey, and the school wanted her back, so she reluctantly went back for ninth grade.

She struggled for two more years, but by her junior year she made numerous friends and no longer wanted to leave.

All MHS students live in same-sex group homes, 12 to a house, supervised by married parents who are full-time MHS employees.

The housemates eat meals together, walk to classes together, and have an hour of "family time" together in the afternoon before dinner.

Students live on campus year-round with a month's vacation in the summer and time off for Christmas and other holidays plus a weekend at home up to once a month.

More Thursday.



LAIGHNA WILL



MILTON HERSHEY SCHOOL, just east of Harrisburg, is the nation's wealthiest private school. The school houses and pays all expenses for about 2,100 students in grades pre-K-12, all from low-income families.