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McCarthy family sends another son to MIT

Thursday, December 24, 2009 By Susan Gordanier The Hillsboro Argus

The Argus

If Alex and Brian McCarthy weren't related, they would likely still be best friends.

Asked if they believed this true, they replied, almost in harmony, "Definitely."

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So, it's no surprise that Alex will join his brother in fall 2010 as an undergraduate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, Mass. Alex, 18, will graduate from Hillsboro's Liberty High School in June; Brian, now 20, was valedictorian of Liberty's class of 2008 and is now a sophomore at the prestigious institute.

The two have too much in common not to enjoy each other's company. They share a love of the sciences and reading. Both have quiet demeanors that might be mistaken for shyness. Spend awhile with them, though, and it becomes clear both McCarthys are close observers, and that means they listen as attentively as they choose their replies - traits valuable to a observant scientist.

At least part of the explanation of their success comes from the values their parents, Karen and Brian McCarthy, incorporated into raising their sons. Brian says, "They read to us a lot, which made us both passionate readers." Neither he nor his brother played video games as children, Alex added. Their parents supported them wherever their interests led, which for both boys turned out to be mathematics and science and led to both choosing MIT as their first choice for college.

Tuition and other costs at MIT currently cost almost \$38,000 for a single academic year, a daunting amount for a family with a single college-bound child, let alone two. Brian received a \$50,000 scholarship from Intel Corp. when as a senior he earned third place in the national Intel Science Search competition. He's quick to point out that the scholarship will cover only about a quarter of his total undergraduate expenses. Other sources, including his parents, must cover the rest.

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Alex will not learn how much financial aid he will receive until at least April 2010. MIT follows a need-blind policy in accepting students, so the McCarthy family is fairly safe in assuming Alex will receive a package of grant and loan money. But he says, once again, his parents have promised their support, no matter how the aid package turns out.

Alex says his favorite class during this term at Liberty is digital electronics, which covers resistors, capacitors and circuitry design. "I assume this is stuff I'll have to know anyway at some point," he said. He also is studying physics, advanced placement literature and fulfilling his senior project in engineering with a paper about research he did in the summer at Portland State University.

Alex says his high school experience has been very positive. "I have friends who are into the same things as I am.," he said. He also cites the influence of individual teachers, who "make all the difference" - especially Dr. Milt Scholl - rather than the academy structure of the school, as contributing to his success. "I had him every year," he said. "He was really inspiring for science."

Scholl is one of the coaches for the Science Olympiad and also started a robotics team this year at Liberty. Alex said. "He is big on bringing extra outside science activities into the school."

Alex plans to study mechanical engineering at MIT, while Brian continues to focus on chemistry. Of the campus culture that will greet his brother in the fall, Brian says, "Every single person I met was passionate about something." Their private interests can range far afield from science or engineering. "I'm always discovering something new about my friends," he said.

Maybe the new environment will reveal something new about his best friend, Alex, too.

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