

Girls Preparatory School Cum Laude

3 of 11 Honorees are St. Nicholas Alums

Three of eleven students from the Class of 2018 were honored at GPS with the highest academic accolade bestowed upon a Girls Preparatory School student—membership in Cum Laude.

First to be introduced is **Mary Margaret Arrowsmith**, who is attending Davidson College (Davidson, North Carolina) this fall. Mr. Bryant Haynes, Arrowsmith's physics teacher, used an arrow as a visual aid to describe her. "Just as an arrow flexes as it flies and spins about its long axis in gyroscopic stabilization, so Mary Margaret has exhibited that balance of hard work, focus, and determination that has brought her to this point in her career and onto this stage today," Haynes says.

Arrowsmith and Haynes have a special connection outside the classroom—as bandmates. She plays the banjo and he the fiddle in the GPS Irregular String Band. Haynes says Arrowsmith will continue playing music when she goes off to Davidson College, having been invited by one of the professors there to join in the old-time music scene. "How appropriate that her musical skills, begun and developed here on the western side of these mountains, go with her over to the eastern side of the Appalachians," Haynes says.

Lyla Murfee Jones is introduced by Callie Hamilton, her history teacher, who describes her student as "unencumbered by ego" and unafraid to learn. "The world fascinates Murfee," Hamilton says. "It is her life's curriculum, and natural curiosity will fuel her ever-growing wisdom. While excellence looks easy for Murfee, it's not inevitable."

A four-sport athlete, Jones is attending Washington and Lee University (Lexington, Virginia) this fall and signed a national letter of intent to run track for the Generals; she co-holds the GPS record for pole vaulting at 10'. Hamilton shares what Jones means to others as a much-loved sister and daughter, a fun-loving friend, a scholar, an artist. "What's remarkable is Murfee's internal metronome," she says. "Her spirit sets the tempo; her body keeps pace. It takes mental toughness and physical strength to push through. Murfee's prowess in athletics and academics—from cheering to AP courses—comes from hard work, dedication, and hours and hours of practice and study. She carries herself lightly, even laden with medals and awards."

Kathryn (Kate) Sarah Thel is introduced by her tennis coach, Sue Bartlett. President of National Honor Society and Editor-in-Chief of Spectrum, Thel is also a National Merit Scholarship Finalist. She is attending the University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame, Indiana). Bartlett describes Thel as intelligent, thoughtful, empathetic, humorous, kind, humble, compassionate, fair, and a servant leader. The coach and player first crossed paths on the tennis courts nine years ago when Thel was in fourth grade. "Her racquet was almost as tall as she," Bartlett recalls. "Kate entered with a shy smile, a calm presence, and an eagerness to learn."

Bartlett praises Thel for her time management skills, keeping up a rigorous academic load while playing a year-round sport and volunteering. "How can anyone not admire and love a student like Kate?" she asks. "Someone who gives 100 percent of what she can, every day; someone who learns because she wants to, not because she has to; someone who has slight obsessions with One Direction and Hamilton. It has been a pleasure, honor, and privilege to spend these years with Kate."

Kate is also one of four finalists in the 2018 National Merit Scholarship program. All GPS National Merit Semifinalists go on to earn Finalist status and these scholarship recipients joined more than 330,000 other distinguished young people who have earned the Merit Scholar title. She was chosen to read her chapel talk at the Graduation Ceremony.



Kate Thel, Mary Margaret Arrowsmith, and Murfee Jones

(Article from Girls Preparatory School)