

Martin awarded prestigious Cooke scholarship

After running into a few obstacles while applying for the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, Lee College sophomore Zachary Martin had almost given up on the possibility of being one of just 75 community college students selected nationwide.

Then Georgeann Ward, coordinator of the college Honors Program, stood up at a recent event to make a special announcement.

Martin, a graduate of Ross S. Sterling High School in Baytown and co-captain of the award-winning college Debate Team, had just finished an exhibition round and was expecting to hear the judges' decision. Instead, Ward told the 30 supporters gathered in the Bayer Conference Center that Martin had been named a 2014 Jack Kent Cooke Scholar.

The highly selective Cooke Foundation scholarship is the largest private scholarship for community college transfer students in the country. Recipients receive up to \$30,000 per year to attend an accredited, four-year college or university, where they can pursue any course of study they choose. The award money may be used for tuition, living expenses, books and other required fees.

"I was completely blown away," said Martin, an honors student and the fourth Jack Kent Cooke scholarship recipient in Lee College history. "Ever since I graduated from high school, I didn't know how I was going to pay for college. To know that I'll be able to go and get my education without worrying about that is such a burden off my shoulders. It's a blessing from God himself."

Cooke scholarship applicants must be current students at an accredited U.S. community college or 2-year institution with sophomore status; have a cumulative college GPA of 3.5 or higher; plan to transfer to a 4-year college or university to begin studies in the coming fall; and demonstrate significant unmet financial need.

A member of the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Martin has earned a 4.0 GPA and will graduate from Lee College in May with an associate degree in music. He is ranked the No. 1 novice debater in the country by the International Public Debate Association, and has also received statewide honors for choir, among many other accolades.

Charlotte Mueller, a music instructor at the college, said she can't imagine a more worthy recipient of the Jack Kent Cooke scholarship than Martin. A student in her music literature and applied piano classes, Martin was a role model and natural team player who never let personal adversity get him down.

His character and deep sense of self-worth and value left an impression, she said.

"Whatever Zach does, he puts his heart and soul into it," Mueller said. "He goes out of his way to encourage other students to do their best. While his responses and answers to questions in class were first-rate, he always turned to other students and prompted them with comments that he knew would lead them to make significant contributions to the class discussion as well."

Though he has not yet made a final decision about where he will continue his collegiate studies, Martin said he is excited about what the future holds.

“I am very pleased and grateful that I received so much support in making sure my education at Lee College was the best it could be,” he said shortly after learning he was named a Jack Kent Cooke Scholar. “I thank you all so very much, because you’ve really made a difference in my life.”