

The Academic Excellence Award is conferred on a student whose academic performance during the year demonstrates remarkable consistency at the highest level of achievement. The intent of the award is to reward those who have rewarded us in the classroom – both students and faculty - who achieve on a level of excellence matched by the values of scholarship we all hold dear, and who study with intensity, motivate themselves and others, and genuinely celebrate learning in all aspects to its fullest.

AND:

The CRMS Community Award is the highest recognition the school community can bestow on a student. Those who receive the award embody the enduring values that have been at the core of the school since its beginning – respect, responsibility, and excellence. The award recognizes individuals for their responsibility beyond themselves, for their willingness to work for the benefit of all, and for the legacy, through example, that endures in the memories of everyone.

This year the faculty have selected a single recipient for both awards.

This student is a four year senior and four years ago would not have imagined being here at this graduation. When she came to CRMS she left behind close friends, a comfortable home and surroundings, a familiar culture, routines, habits and comforts.

Upon contemplating a ten day wilderness trip she probably thought the outdoors was better left to the bears, coyotes, elk and raccoons. I mean, why would anyone want to hike in the woods, with a heavy pack, and get dirty and sweaty? Why would any sane person want to dodge lightning, rain, sleet and hail, while sleeping under a thin piece of plastic after eating cold beans and rice on a dried up tortilla with cheese that had softened after being in the sun all day?

Then she came to campus. It seemed she felt that CRMS was not a very good school; she didn't like her classes, and she did not seem to like any of her peers, her advisor, or most of her teachers.

She was encouraged to step back and be more open-minded. She was asked, "What can you do to make this school or class better? How can you help? What do you have to offer? Is the teacher the only source of information, or is it partially your responsibility?"

Tears and frustration followed but as each day, each week and each year went by things began to improve. She began to balance a long held passion for tennis with friendships, snowboarding, bike riding, rock climbing, music, and an appreciation of a new place, environment and culture.

She began to help others, volunteer and participate and contribute fully. She helped design and teach a zebra fish genetics course for summer school.

During the same summer she studied Spanish privately because she took every French course the school had to offer and wanted to be able to enter Spanish 3 in the fall. She was a dedicated contributing member of the policy panel. She tutored her peers and was involved in our media work crew.

She helped run the sound board and video camera for coffee house performances and school band concerts. During her senior year she took six high level classes and then for the second semester took advanced music so she would be able to perform in the senior recital, ending the year with a virtually perfect grade point average.

Well she completed the entire wilderness trip - we would not let her leave the field. Tears were flowing every day as her group encouraged her to take one step at a time. This student has moved from isolation to participation and from sadness to happiness. She represents what is possible if you embrace challenges, adversity and differences. It is unlikely she will take on any extended back packing trips, but with her passion for life and academics, it is with certainty she will impact the world in a positive manner.

It gives me great pleasure in presenting both the 2010 Academic Award and Community Award to Courtney Bender, who will be attending the University of Pennsylvania next fall.