

2015 Graduate Profile: Mercy researcher eyes cancer cure



By Melody Simmons

Special to the Review

“Have you read ‘The Hot Zone’?” asks Amanda Green, a recent graduate of Mercy High School.

The 17-year-old was so inspired by the 1995 book by Richard Preston about the spread of a deadly virus that it inspired her to pursue a career in molecular biology.

This fall, she will begin that journey as a freshman at the University of Maryland College Park in its Honors College. She will bring with her a scientist’s creed of questioning and seeking answers, along with strong math and research skills.

At Mercy High, Green decided to steer away from a previously chosen path of mechanical engineering after she took freshman biology.

“I like classes that are really challenging and difficult,” she said, of a class taught by Nancy Uryasz, Mercy’s science department chair and Green’s advisor for three years. “Ms. Uryasz made me work harder than I’ve ever worked before. That helped me fall in love with bio.”

Green branched out with that quest in her sophomore and junior years, even working at the Human Genome Diagnostics lab, where DNA is sequenced and studied for mutations. Such work furthered her goals toward a life of research – she aspires to work at the National Institutes of Health or at the World Health Organization.

A cousin’s death at age 6 of leukemia was also a source of motivation to join the scientific army in search of a cure for cancer. As a child, Green herself suffered from Lyme disease, vertigo and migraines – and that also “helped me wonder – why does

this happen to some people and not others?”

“I just want to find a cure to stop that from happening,” she said. “I wonder how, how on Earth something that’s a shred of our RNA or DNA in a little protein bundle ... can do that to somebody?”

“Some people look up at the stars and say ‘Oh, my God, the universe is so big, and I’m so small,’ and we just put that into perspective. I’m kind of the opposite. I look at the fine details.”

Green also made a mark at Mercy High in drama. As vice president of tech in the school’s Footlighters Theatre Group, she helped to design sets for productions of “Steel Magnolias” and “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

She admitted that biology and theatre were opposites – but have been essential to help her balance her studies.

“Having theatre as an outlet (helped) because school was very stressful,” she said. “It’s nice to have art in your life.”

Uryasz said Green has been a role model at Mercy.

“Amanda is an extremely talented and articulate young woman,” she said. “She is a person of strong personal integrity and compassion. Amanda has earned the respect of her peers and the pride of her teachers.”

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