

Seniors go the distance to attend St. Maria Goretti in Hagerstown

HAGERSTOWN – Sean Clem crosses the Blue Ridge from his home in Frederick every school day.

Rahsaan Edwards crosses a state line from his, in Charles Town, W.Va.

The two seniors at St. Maria Goretti High School in Hagerstown exemplify the regional nature of the institution, one whose goodwill visits during Catholic Schools Week included not just to St. Mary Catholic School, the pre-K-8 National Blue Ribbon School two miles to the south, but to Corpus Christi Catholic School in Chambersburg, Pa.

“We’ve gotten the word out, that we’re a viable option,” said Chris Cossentino, president of the school not far from the intersection of Interstates 70 and 81.

For Clem and his family, its appeal included a strong financial aid package and, he said, “the whole Goretti family thing.”

“It’s a relatively small school,” Clem said, of one which has approximately 220 students. “From the staff to the students, everyone is looking out for one another.”

Clem grew up in St. John the Evangelist Parish, and graduated from St. John Regional Catholic School, both in Frederick. At St. Maria Goretti, he’s a member of the National Honor Society, French Honor Society and treasurer of the SGA.

He runs cross country and plays lacrosse for the Gaels, but Clem’s primary athletic pursuit is Alpine skiing, which has his college search centered on those in proximity to some of the best slopes on the East Coast.

He’s been accepted at the University of Vermont and St. Michael’s, both in Burlington, and St. Anselm College in Manchester, N.H. Clem is a history buff, but his options include a pre-med track, thanks to a seed planted by Anne Barton, a former science teacher at St. Maria Goretti.

Edwards spent the last two school years commuting on the fee-based Goretti bus that makes stops in Martinsburg and Shepherdstown, W.Va. This year, he's making that nearly hour-long drive behind the wheel of a 2009 Jeep Patriot.

He's drawn by a basketball program that figures to have the Gaels challenging defending champion St. Frances Academy and Mount St. Joseph High School in the 48th annual Baltimore Catholic League tournament.

"I just thought it was the right fit for me," Edwards said of Goretti. "I knew it would help me grow and prepare me for the college experience."

His current course load includes physics, statistics and French.

He was recruited to play basketball at Goretti, where he spent his first three seasons under coach Matt Miller, now an assistant coach at Mount St. Mary's University. Edwards is the veteran point guard for current coach Sidney McCray, who played for Shepherd University when its staff included Miller.

Edwards directs a team that starts four other seniors, RJ Blakney, James Searcy, Przemek Golek and Abdou Tsimbila, the latter two natives of Poland and Cameroon, respectively.

"We didn't skip a beat coming into this season," said Edwards, whose leadership includes playing quarterback in football and shortstop in baseball as a youth. "I've always been in a situation where I had to talk."

Email Paul McMullen at pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org