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Support Young Leaders, Our Greatest Hope for the Future

By Senator Pam Helming

As a State Senator, I speak with young people of all ages. I'm always impressed with their knowledge and understanding of our state government, as well as their honesty, curiosity, and the spontaneity of their questions.

This was the case during recent conversations with the Red Jacket fifth grade class and the government classes at Roberts Wesleyan University and SUNY Geneseo. Similar discussions have occurred at the State Capitol, where I've met with cadets attending the United States Military Academy at West Point, members of the Civil Air Patrol, and numerous students enrolled in various courses of study including healthcare, agriculture, and education.

To highlight the tremendous achievements of our local high school students, I host an annual Youth Leadership Recognition Program.

This year, 24 students from 22 districts were recognized for their academic accomplishments and their leadership in the areas of agricultural education, entrepreneurship, peer leadership, and community service.

These are hardworking kids from diverse backgrounds. What they have in common is a strong desire to make a positive difference in their communities, the state, and our world.

Baylei Reed is a class officer, three-sport athlete, and member of Future Farmers of America at Lyons Senior High School. Her advocacy for the farming community brought her to my office in Albany where she made a strong case for supporting our family farms and ag in the classroom.

Cameran MacArthur of Red Creek High School is enrolled in several high honors and college-level courses. She is a member of the Science Olympiad team and cross country and track teams. Cameran is also an entrepreneur and accomplished small businesswoman with an online shop on Etsy.

Jenna North is a varsity basketball player at Red Jacket and shared her story of leadership and perseverance after suffering a season-ending ACL tear during a game. Jenna chose to rehab her knee and remain with the team as the scorekeeper. She returned to the court this season, serving as an example to never give up, no matter how hard it gets.

Abigail Provo of Mount Morris High School is a member of the Livingston County Youth Court. I had the opportunity to see Abby's leadership skills when she visited me at the State Capitol and shared her experience as a member of this peer-led program that helps students gain a better understanding of the court system while ensuring young offenders get the help they need.

Moises Arteaga-Martinez is class president at Williamson High School, a high honor roll student, and a three-sport athlete with a strong sense of duty and patriotism. He believes in pushing himself to be the best he can be. Moises is committed to our country and is considering attending West Point or joining an ROTC program following graduation.

These young citizens and many others are our greatest hope for a better future. I always say, if you want to be inspired, talk with a young person! From the classroom to the community center to the halls of government, let's all listen to and encourage the next generation of leaders.

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