



Courtesy photo

Wood River High School junior Malila Freeman has a thirst for learning.

# MALILA FREEMAN

## *Passionate about compassion*

BY JONATHAN KANE

Wood River High School junior Malila Freeman has an unending thirst to understand how the world works and is passionate about compassion.

"I'm interested in anything that helps me discover how things fit together, relate to each other and how people help each other, whether that be through psychology, economics, Compassionate Young Leaders or community service," Freeman said.

"I try to put as much effort as possible into my school work because it's so important. I also try to reach out to as many groups of people as I can and try to have friends from as many places and backgrounds as possible."

Freeman's attitude about learning is reflected in her grade point average, which stands at 4.1.

"I really like school a lot," she said. "Not the stressful part, but learning itself. My friends and I like to talk about how the learning part is fascinating and opens so many doors."

"I love getting to the point where different subjects relate to each other. You know and understand one thing in one discipline and then you add that to something that you knew before from another discipline."

Freeman said her favorite subject is English, and she enjoys writing nonfiction the most.

"I like to analyze books and write research papers by incorporating my own personal opinion," she said. "Last year I really got into a paper on industrial agriculture, mainly because my family has an organic farm, so that really interested me."

This year, Freeman was accepted into the Compassionate Young Leaders program and she hopes to travel to India in the spring with the group. She describes the program as "encouraging people

to encompass, acknowledge and respect different ways of life and cultures and use those to enrich your own life."

Freeman is one of 30 high school juniors in the program. Some of them will be traveling to the Philippines as well as India.

"I've talked to a lot of students that have already gone and they talked about their adventures and culture shock, but they all said it was the best thing they have ever or will ever experience," she said.

"It will be amazing to get exposed to the uniqueness of another culture and experiencing how they live. And then to be able to help them in an unconventional way will give us a deeper level of integration."

The Compassionate Young Leaders meet as a group on Tuesday evenings to practice "mindfulness" and to discuss humanitarian issues.

"Mindfulness is a form of meditation where you learn to blank your mind and become more reflective and calm," Freeman said. "It's hard for me as I start out and then there are moments where it clicks and those moments feel so right and natural."

As part of the program, Freeman is required to fundraise and perform 100 hours of community service. Part of the community service will be through her work as a dancer with Footlight Dance Centre and the lecture demonstrations the Centre does at schools.

"It's so cool to see how kids react to a live performance in front of them," she said. "I love giving back to the community and seeing how much of a difference you are making."

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*Editor's note: Anyone who would like to recommend a local student for The Weekly Sun's "Student Spotlight" feature should contact Jonathan Kane at [jkjonkane@gmail.com](mailto:jkjonkane@gmail.com).*

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