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PFLAG Cape Cod Names 2020 Winners of the Anne Toran Scholarship

Cape Cod, MA (June 2020) - Two seniors at Cape Cod high schools have been named winners of the 2020 Anne Toran Scholarship for their work on behalf of LGBTQ civil and human rights on the Cape and Islands.

Joseph “Joey” Morisset, a senior at Bourne High School, and **Shannon Wanamaker**, a senior at Nauset Regional High School, have been awarded scholarships of \$2000 and \$1,000 respectively, for their work in support and advocacy of people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning.

“We chose Joey and Shannon for these college scholarships because of their courage and outstanding work on behalf of LGBTQ youth everywhere, who are often subject to bullying, harassment, social marginalization, and other forms of discrimination and prejudice,” noted Joe Lima, president of PFLAG Cape Cod.”

Finding the Courage to Speak Up

Joey’s journey in accepting his gay orientation and becoming an advocate for others in the LGBTQ Community began the summer of his junior year of high school, when he attended the

Massachusetts Boys State Leadership Conference at Stonehill College. Sponsored by the American Legion, the goal of the Conference is to teach democratic values and acquaint participants with the workings of democracy. For Joey, the experience was eye-opening, introducing him first-hand to the prejudice many people harbor for people who identify as LGBTQ+. “I was surrounded by ignorance and hate toward the LGBTQ community,” he says.

But then Joey began to find his voice. “It was hard at first, but I began speaking up for the LGBTQ community [in discussions we were having] calling out ignorance, combatting misconceptions, and showing people the importance of empathy,” with others unlike themselves.

As the week progressed, Joey started to feel his forceful support of LGBTQ people was having an impact on others. “As I spoke for the LGBTQ+ community in rooms full of peers who disagreed with me, people began admitting that I was creating a change of heart.”

After finding the courage and strength to speak out on LGBTQ issues through his experience at Boys State, Joey decided to become a stronger, more open advocate of the LGBTQ+ community when he returned for his senior year at Bourne High School. He joined the school’s Gay/Straight Alliance and became the school’s first-ever male cheerleader! He also auditioned for, and accepted, the openly gay role of Harry Bright in his school’s production of *Mamma Mia*.

“My town is rather small and conservative, and knowing I’d be playing a character that normalizes the LGBTQ+ community scared me, but I did not back down,” he says.

Joey “is a remarkably fearless, charming, and compassionate young man,” according to Elizabeth Sylvia, Faculty Advisor to Bourne’s GSA Club. “He’s the perfect recipient for a PFLAG scholarship because he has been such a guiding member of the Bourne High School community. I truly think of him as a person who ‘leads with love,’ a quality we need so much in these troubling, divided times.”

Besides his activism on behalf of LGBTQ rights, Joey is also a member of the National Honor Society and student council. In the fall, Joey (he/him/his) plans to attend UMass-Boston and study Psychology.

A Demonstrated Commitment to the LGBTQ Community

For **Shannon**, the journey toward acceptance of her queer identity (she identifies as pansexual/queer) began in her freshman year of high school and has grown year by year ever since. She attended her first meeting of her school's Gay/Straight Alliance (GSA) when she was a freshman and soon thereafter became involved in activities and outreach efforts that both educated her about queer history, and gave her the opportunity to learn about the unique challenges of the LGBTQ community, including the community's suicide rate, which is significantly higher than that for heterosexual youth.

Shannon also became a vocal advocate on issues impacting members of the LGBTQ+ community. In 2018, as a member of her school's Human Rights Academy, she took part in a phone bank and public forum at her school, intended to educate members of the community about a ballot question, on the November ballot that year, which would have rolled back human rights protections for transgender persons. The forum, which attracted a crowd and generated significant controversy, gave Shannon an opportunity to voice support for the rights of transgender people. "I overcame my anxiety and addressed the crowd, explaining the crucial need of the protection act," she says.

During her senior year at Nauset High School, Shannon has served as President of the school's Gay/Straight Alliance, and as Treasurer of the school's Human Rights Academy.

Shannon "is deeply committed to environmental concerns, human rights, and civil rights causes," notes Lisa Brown, who serves as Faculty Advisor to Nauset's Human Rights Academy. "Besides being of excellent character and a gifted communicator, she is a voice of reason and sees many sides to a story."

Those sentiments are echoed by Karen Brandes Novacon, one of Shannon's English teachers at Nauset: "Shannon is a leader in both the Gay/Straight Alliance and Human Rights Academy, two

groups on campus that are working hard to make all students safe and accepted. The issues that these groups tackle are areas of great concern for Shannon,” and have made her “a leader on our campus when it comes to issues of human rights and equality ...”

Besides her involvement with LGBTQ issues, Shannon has also participated in her school’s Black Student Union, Art Club and Math Club. In the fall, Shannon (she/her/hers) plans to attend U-Mass Boston and major in psychology.

The Anne Toran Scholarship is awarded annually to high school seniors who demonstrate commitment and leadership on issues of concern to the LGBTQ community. Since 2003, PFLAG Cape Cod has awarded over \$61,000 in scholarships to high school seniors who have demonstrated leadership on behalf of LGBTQ rights in their schools and communities.

About PFLAG Cape Cod

PFLAG Cape Cod is a non-profit organization that provides support, education, and advocacy to parents, families, friends, allies, and members of the LGBTQ community. Through monthly support meetings, community events, and engagement with local, state, and national legislators and leaders, we seek to serve, defend, and protect members of the LGBTQ community and advance public understanding of the issues confronting LGBTQ youth and their families today.

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