



## **Homeschooled scholar devoted to studies**

**By Troy Moon**

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Steve Reeves loved teaching Brynne Piotrowski.

He enjoyed her enthusiasm, her smarts and her resolve.

Never mind that he actually has never met his star student face to face.

Brynne, 17, was homeschooled through the Florida Virtual School, which provides curriculum and off-site instructors for the students.

And so what if Brynne did her schoolwork from her home computer and set her own school schedule?

It worked.

Brynne is one of only three National Merit Scholars in the Pensacola Bay Area, and one of the 11 National Merit Scholarship finalists in the two-county area.

"Some people think that when you're homeschooled, you're sitting around in your PJs all day," Brynne said from her classroom, which doubles as her Cordova Park home. "And, yes, I could sleep in. But I don't like to."

Brynne's mother, Pamela Piotrowski, agreed that her daughter needed little academic guidance or oversight. And she said Brynne never had to be pushed out of bed to start studying.

"Her self-discipline is just phenomenal," Pamela Piotrowski said. "She loves to run, so she'll wake up early in the morning to do that and then start her work. Sometimes, she'll stay up and work until midnight. I'll have to tell her sometimes to give school a break."

Her father, David Piotrowski, agrees that the hands-off approach works with their academic star.

"You don't have to look over her shoulder," he said. "I don't think I've ever had to ask her, 'Brynne, have you done this?' She's not the kind of person you have to check back on."

Brynne attended Pensacola High School's lauded and challenging International Baccalaureate program as a freshman, and then opted for homeschooling through the Florida Virtual School as a sophomore.

"She started off at IB," said her close friend Ryan Heffernan, 17, who graduated from the International Baccalaureate program in May. "And she would never tell you this, but it was not challenging enough for her. She's about the smartest person I know."

Brynne might have been doing her work from home, but it was regulated through the Florida Virtual School. Curriculum was monitored. Teachers communicated with her through e-mail or phone calls.

"They're very personable," Brynne said. "You get to know them well, even though you don't meet them."

Reeves, her history teacher from the Florida Virtual School, agreed.

"I got to know her and her family really well," Reeves said from Gainesville, where he's been a Florida Virtual School instructor for seven years. "But Brynne was such a carefree student and required very little maintenance. I don't think our relationship was the least bit hindered. I really know her as well as any of the students I have taught (in traditional classrooms.)"

Brynne has been dual-enrolled at Pensacola Junior College over the last two years, earning 27 college credits.

Did she ever get the feeling that she was missing out on the high school hijinks? The camaraderie? Prom? Graduation? Senior Skip Day?

"No, I don't have the (graduation) walk," she said. "I'm just done."

Besides, she said, "I would look bad in a gown."

And it's not like she's a shut-in. Homeschooled does not translate to hermit.

She runs. She plays sports with her church. She plays piano and spends free time with friends. She volunteers and tutors at A.K. Suter Elementary School.

"You don't have the everyday social interaction," she said. "But being at PHS and IB, I met a lot of friends and keep in touch. We go to the beach. At PJC, I've made friends there. You could be a hermit, but there are so many opportunities to take advantage of."

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