



Effingham County Beyond *the* Tassel

THE MAGAZINE & PODCAST

Post Secondary
Possibilities:

**LIFE BEYOND
HIGH SCHOOL**

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Effingham High School
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Effingham High School
St. Anthony High School

ONLINE FEATURE
**Effingham County
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Where are they now?**
Dr. Mike Nayak, EHS '90

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Why we do what we do.

The Journey12 mission, through its Beyond the Tassel Podcasts, magazines, and online content, is to help young people from America's rural communities make the most of their post-secondary opportunities. We believe strongly in the power of example, encouragement, and inspiration, and we work hard to incorporate all three in our messaging.

Stories of America's young achievers are a potent force for planting seeds and awakening the aspirations of their peers. Encouragement from accomplished alumni of our local schools can lift the perception of limits and constraints, serving to grease the skids for options beyond high school. Finally, the tactical 'post-secondary how-to' toolbox of the Beyond the Tassel podcast series, provides students and families with actionable strategies and step-by-step measures they can take to find fit, seize tangible opportunities, and resolve the financial puzzles blocking the path.

Inspiration can provide a powerful boost in our lives. It can lift the lost from despair or move the ordinary to extraordinary. It comes from different places for different people; there are those who find it in the solemnity of prayer and those who find it in the encouraging noise of a crowd. Some can find it in the words of a mentor while others must find it in a problem to be solved. And this is what makes us all unique, but the common need to both

inspire and be inspired, to encourage and be encouraged, binds us one to another. A rising tide lifts all boats.

We believe so strongly in the young people of rural America and in their ability to do tremendous things. We celebrate them here, but that's just the start. Through their stories, struggles, victories, and plans, it is our hope that this collection of post-secondary intentions from Effingham County will shine a relatable light on the possibilities for someone who is searching for their own best post-secondary fit or encourage someone to build their dream and seize their own opportunity. These young people are very much like you: extraordinarily capable of accomplishing amazing things. You are extraordinarily capable. Perhaps more so than you know.

Here's to you, to your dreams, and to your aspirations.



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Founder & Publisher, Journey12

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“

It is the purpose of every educator to inspire and support students to achieve heights even the student didn't know possible. It is a privilege to be a part of their lives as they set in place their plans for a future that will bring them happiness and contentment. The hope is that all students know they also can plan a future that takes them to heights beyond even their dreams.”

*- Kurt Roberts, Principal
Effingham High School*

“

Our kids are so well-prepared for the future and we are extraordinarily proud of them all. It is my hope that their stories will inspire others within our community and beyond.”

*- Cary Jackson, Superintendent
Dieterich Unit 30 Schools*

“

Effingham County students are well-equipped for their journey and will have a great impact in our world. As you can see from these stories, our young people are filled with great ideas, initiative and concern for others. We hope these stories and their witness will encourage the next group of graduates from our community!

*- Greg Fearday Principal
St. Anthony High School”*

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For her, 'calm' seems to be both the journey and the destination.

Leah Hanfland Effingham High School > Art Education

The Journey, the Destination

HISTORY HAS ITS LESSONS, ITS HARDSHIPS, AND ITS SILVER LININGS.

AT 18, LEAH HANFLAND HAS EXPERIENCED HER SHARE OF EACH. And her personal history has accrued as a stockpile of insights and empathy. She looks at her friend, Jacqueline, and admires her courage and kindness. She sees the relatability, authenticity, and talent wrought by hard work and dedication in Mr. Huber, her art teacher. Her younger brother — a freshman this year — causes her to reflect on her younger self and on what she'd tell that person about what lies ahead. "Focus on your eternity," she'd say. "A lot of the stuff you'll think matters, just doesn't," she'd tell her freshman self. She is possessed of a kind of contemplative character uncommon in most people I know who are three times her age. For her, 'calm' seems to be both the journey and the destination.

“focus on your **eternity**”

And, so, enter art. Leah's been making art since she was a young girl, and these days she loves to do portraits in charcoal. But her real love is in the possibility of bringing a small corner of her state of Zen to high school students like herself, as a teacher, after she graduates from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis — IUPUI. Leah expands, "As a high school student, life is coming at you so fast, from all different directions." We talk about it, and exchange stories of profound high school shifts we've both experienced. And how those shifts — some of them tectonic — have shaped who we've become. Expectations mount, friendships evolve, families morph, but life goes on, and art

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Katie Stanley

Dieterich High School > Special Needs Caregiver

Determination and Resilience

KATIE STANLEY HAS ATTENDED 3 HIGH SCHOOLS IN HER 4-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL CAREER. SHE HAS HAD AN INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN (IEP) FOR AS LONG AS SHE CAN REMEMBER.

She has trouble with math and with reading. And before she arrived at Dieterich High School for her junior year, she had some trouble with regular attendance. She pauses here and says, “But mostly, my skipping school was because I was being bullied.” To hear her tell it, the takeaway isn’t a story of loss or of hurdles as much as it is a story of determination and resilience.

Katie has played a kind of Judo with her obstacles, pulling their energy into the service of her own advantage, her own refinement. Think of it as the rock-tumbler effect; (Google it, if you’ve never heard of one!) What went in as an ordinary rock came out as a gemstone in her hands.



“If uncertainty is unacceptable to you, it turns into fear. If it is perfectly acceptable, it turns into increased aliveness, alertness, and creativity.”

Eckhart Tolle

“Katie transforms obstacles to advantages.”

Next Fall, she’ll be attending Lakeland College in Mattoon, Illinois and wants to work with people who have disabilities or special needs and she has a particular interest in helping people with Down Syndrome. Primarily, she credits three people for the positive path she’s found; her Biology teacher, Bryan McMillan; her Special Education teacher, Deanna Jansen; and her mother, whom she has watched struggle through her own challenges as a single mother, raising Katie and her brothers, relocating the family for better opportunity, attending college, and — as Katie says — “generally making the most of her life.”

In this especially inspiring young woman, I see empathy, intelligence, humility, acceptance, and determination. Remarkable characteristics, which will not only serve her well, but which will serve those lucky enough to be in her sphere. 🙌

*Congratulations
Class of 2021*

Time to take the Wheel!



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Alex Sporleder

Effingham High School > Agriculture

Tech is at Home on the Farm

AFTER THE FINAL BELL ON HIS SENIOR YEAR AT EFFINGHAM HIGH SCHOOL, ALEX SPORLEDER

will be heading to Shelbyville to get his hands dirty at Sloan Implement in a summer job before starting class at Lake Land College's highly respected John Deere TECH Program in the fall. Farming is big business in Effingham County and it is in Alex's blood. The technicians and mechanics entrusted to work on million dollar combines and tractors equipped with GPS systems as accurate as those used in the U.S. military are among the most highly skilled in America. Alex understands that today's farmers must be prepared to deal with more variability and contend with greater market complexity than virtually any other business and this is the world for which Alex is preparing. He's been solving science, technology, engineering, and math problems with his father and grandfather on their Centennial Farm in rural Effingham County since he was a young boy. Five generations of Sporleders have worked this farm before him and he is intent on being part of the sixth.

The country life suits Alex and he makes the most of it. When he isn't operating or repairing equipment on the farm, he's almost sure to be fishing, riding four-wheelers, or modifying his truck with friends. He and his dad plan to take up hunting next year, but it hasn't been a huge part of his life so far. A respect for the land, hard work, and family are important throughlines for Alex. And while a traditional 4-year college path may not be his particular glass of sweet tea, he's very much at home applying practical knowledge and understanding that he's acquired through his vocational training and what he intends to learn at Lake Land College.

Of all the things we discuss with students and their families, there is one thing that rings the bell the loudest, and that is 'finding fit.' The world needs lawyers, doctors, and people who run companies. It needs plumbers to fix our pipes and electricians to light our houses, but it especially needs people who grow and

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Isabella Kronewitter

Effingham High School > Speech Pathology

Pursuit of Passion

FUNNY THING ABOUT THE PURSUIT OF A PASSION

... SOMETIMES IT SNEAKS UP ON YOU when you're least expecting it. Such is the case here. Had it not been for a chance encounter with Bella, 3, and Miah, 5, Isabella may well be headed in a very different post-secondary direction. Through a series of unlikely events, the two wound up being fostered in the Kronewitter home for 8-months. During this time, Isabella saw in Bella and Miah the up-close and personal value of spoken communication and the implications of developmental delay. The children had a difficult start in life and lacked much of the nurture most children in Effingham County take for granted; socialization was especially bare. The elder Isabella became very attached to her namesake younger, and to her brother, and realized that she'd found her calling — Speech Pathology.

In a matter of weeks, she was able to arrange for a job shadowing opportunity with Kristin Greene in Flora at [need citation.] The experience was eye-opening and confirmed that she was on the right path. She will attend SIU Edwardsville in the fall as a Speech Pathology major, but it hasn't always

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Reese Jones St. Anthony High School > Marketing

Beautiful Way

FOR REESE JONES, IT'S ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT SOLVING A PROBLEM OR FILLING A NEED. Hers is a

farming family and when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, a number of traditional market channels to the big buyers like Tyson and others slowed or came to a complete stop for the family. Reese witnessed the familiar initiative, gumption and good old-fashioned hard work her mentor had been known for. Reese had seen it for years, since she was small, actually, because her mentor was also her mother.

In a difficult market, smart business people find a way, and her mother's solution to the COVID marketing challenges was to take a page from her experience as a food truck owner-operator and she began offering what she calls 'gate-to-plate' fare to the local market, including custom cuts of pork and beef. Reese has a front row seat to this kind of problem solving and more. She's also fortunate that her school offers an opportunity to participate in CEO, a public-private partnership in Effingham County Schools aimed

at helping students learn about business and create entrepreneurial opportunities or their own. She doesn't think much about it, and she'd never say it defines her, but she's been marinating in problem solving for most of her life.

As part of Reese's involvement with CEO, she's launched her own food truck specializing in her favorite beverage — coffee. She calls her enterprise Belle Vie. The Italian phrase means 'beautiful way,' but Reese just loved the way it rolls off the tongue. As it turns out, it has been a beautiful way for her to stretch her own entrepreneurial legs and to serve others, a thing of great importance to Reese. "Why just work for money and not find a way to help people through that work?" she wonders aloud, as she relates to me a story of one of her mother's ventures that helped fund much needed support for disadvantaged children in the community.

This fall, Reese is taking her big heart and creative mind to Lake Land College, where she'll study business, but plans to attend either

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Ellie Waymoth

Effingham High School > Nursing

Blood, kindness, and hard work.

AS SOMEONE WHO SPENT MOST OF HER TIME IN A SWIMMING POOL,

it might have been hard to imagine what sort of arc would take form in her life, but after her competitive swimming was interrupted at age 12 by a ruptured appendix, and then a broken foot that same summer, Ellie Waymoth found a new gear: hard work. Even

harder work than that which had brought her this far. Struggling to regain her competitive position was both hard and, at the same time, rich with perhaps the singular key lesson of her life to that point, that hard work

will always beat talent that doesn't work hard. Ellie is quick to admit, when I ask her about her how she likes school, that "It's good; I love it, and I do well, but I have to work for it." She tells me that she studies really hard for every grade she earns. All of which brings us back to blood, kindness, and hard work; these are all things to which Ellie seems inexorably drawn. And it's a good thing, because she intends to be a nurse.

**Hard work
will always
beat talent
that doesn't
work hard.**

I ask her how she will change the world through becoming a nurse and her answer tells me everything I need to know about her. "Nurses are important because they play a huge role in a patient's mood, and that patient's mood plays a huge role in their recovery." She could have told

me about the importance of expert medical assistance in the generalized administration of medical care, or she could have told me about the 95% of contact nurses have with their patients versus the 5% their doctors have. But she didn't. Instead, she told me of

the value of kindness and compassion. And that speaks volumes. She saw it when her mother was a cancer patient years earlier. Through the eyes of her youth, she saw nursing compassion up-close and personal and it led her to an interest in helping others. But the patients she wanted to help would never be able to thank her or pay forward her brand of compassionate care; Ellie wanted to become a veterinarian. For as long as she could

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Jackeline GARCIA

Effingham High School > Chemistry

Good Chemistry

Born in America to parents of Mexican heritage, the University of Notre Dame, she is about as far from her beginnings as a person could be.

IN RECOGNITION OF HER 15TH BIRTHDAY, JACKELINE'S PARENTS, BOTH BORN IN MEXICO, celebrated her in

the traditional rite of passage known as the quinceañera. The colorful fiesta marks the transition from childhood to womanhood for Latina honorees in many Spanish-speaking cultures. When Jackeline's parents immigrated to the United States, they had two young sons — ages 5 and 7 — who would be instrumental in helping the family acclimate to their new family and their new language. Mr. Garcia got a work visa and found opportunity in his friend's Mexican Restaurant where he still works to this day. The family may have left the country of their origins behind, but they've held onto the values of hard work, tight family, and a commitment of contribution to their community. And while the quinceañera may have been a symbolic moment of transition for Jackeline, in many ways, she's been in transition her entire life. Born in America to parents of Mexican heritage, the president of the French Club, a math prodigy, a budding chemist, and a class of '25 admitted applicant to The University of Notre Dame, she is about as far from her beginnings as a person could be.

Growing up in Effingham, Jackeline attributes much of her academic success to outstanding guidance from her teachers. She cites French teacher, April Karpus-Weddle, as an extraordinary influence, engendering in her a real love for the French culture, language, and people. A fluent

Spanish-speaker, Jackeline is tri-lingual and is seriously considering a French minor in college. Her Chemistry teacher, Norene Ault, too, has been an outsized influence on Jackeline's post-secondary trajectory as she will almost certainly choose to major in Chemistry in college. And speaking of college, it was that very same Chemistry teacher who made Jackeline aware of Questbridge, a California-based organization that specializes in finding excellent college fit for students with limited financial means. Top students from across the country are finding fit at some of the Nation's top schools, including Vanderbilt, The University of Chicago, Northwestern, Washington University in St. Louis, and more. Jackeline has already been accepted to Notre Dame — no small thing — but she's keeping her options open until she hears back from Questbridge on her other candidate schools.

Jackeline's interests range from painting to tennis to good food and helping people, and at this point in her journey, she imagines herself working in a healthcare or health related field. She's got plenty of time to sort it all out, but for now, dentistry or dermatology seem to be the leading contenders on her short list. Of course, in time, she'll narrow it down and pursue her goals with the same passion and commitment with which she's approached everything else in her life. And, in the process, I have little doubt, she'll bring something very special to our world. 🌈

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soothes. She sees herself, one day, helping students gently navigate some of those sharp edges through a kind of introspection she seems to have found in the act of creating and appreciating art.

IUPUI will give her a big city backdrop from which to explore her world and continue the exploration of herself. She will seek to study abroad, as the opportunity presents; Leah is a daughter of Effingham, but she is a citizen of the world. And she intends to stamp her passport with a broad range of experiences she hopes to share, inspiring others and providing them with tools others have so generously provided her.

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harvest our food. Without them, we don't eat. Knowing what interests you, as a young person, isn't always automatic. For some, it takes time and exploration — sometimes, years. For others, it's as much a part of who they are as their kneecaps or the sound of their voice. Finding the answer to the 'fit' question is a real gift. Alex has found it. He's going to help feed a hungry world, and it's hard to do better than that.

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Illinois State University in Bloomington-Normal or Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville afterwards. She intends to major in marketing. Her life as a daughter of rural America has prepared her well for the work she hopes to do. She has learned the value of hard work, the importance of friends and faith, and the meaning of community. Reese has had her share of adversity, but with each struggle she's overcome and every obstacle she's put in her rearview mirror, she has become stronger. And with the support of her friends, family, fellow entrepreneurs, and those who've encouraged her throughout high school, Reese's world is hers to create.



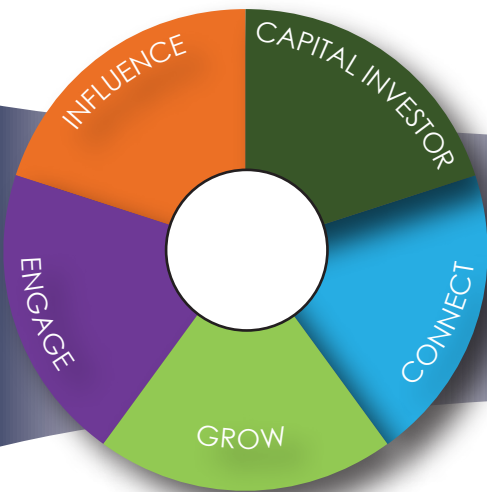
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Mike NAYAK

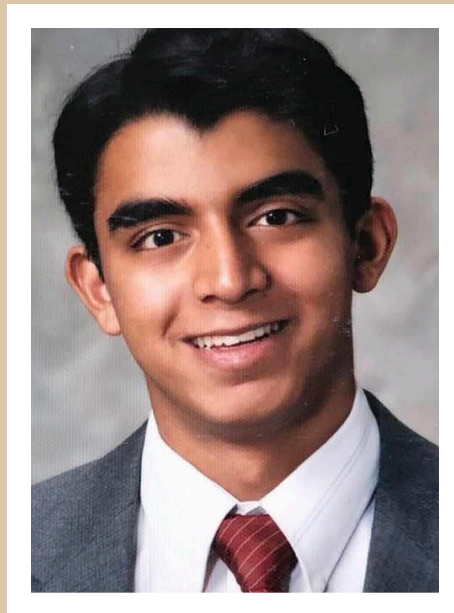
Effingham High School > Class of 1990

MIKE NAYAK, EHS, '90, IS A REMARKABLE GUY. HE IS A GRATEFUL HUSBAND, AN ENGAGED FATHER, AND AN EXTRAORDINARY PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS.

But he's also a good friend, a former Whiffenpoof (more on that later), a bit of a jokester, and a man who knows his way around the kitchen. And it's no surprise, really. "Growing up in Effingham," Mike says, "gave me an amazing range of opportunity. I was very fortunate to have parents who felt so strongly about education as well as some really good teachers who inspired me." He learned about friendship, loyalty, hard work, decency, and fair play in this rural Illinois community of 14,000. He was able

to cultivate his interests in digital media, computer science, logic, psychology, and more, through night classes he was able to take at Lake Land College when he was just twelve years old. He tells me he was able to accrue more than 20 hours of college credit because of the school's willingness to be flexible, and accommodating of a twelve-year-old's interests. He points out that this was not done with any intention of shaving time off post-secondary college endeavors, but was simply a means by which he could formally explore some of his interests. He credits the late Craig Lindvahl as one of his inspirational influences and someone to whom

he traces his love of music and musical performance. He very fondly recalls Mrs. Vera Kepler, crediting her for his present-day appreciation of art, and he tells me he uses his high school Spanish, taught by Tracy Tuman, on a regular basis. Musical theatre at EHS, not only inspired, said Mike, but also imbued him with a kind of confidence and 'grace-under-pressure' that serves him well in virtually everything he's done in life since high school. "There were and are incredibly rich opportunities in Effingham, and I was super fortunate to have been able to take advantage of them."



After high school, Mike attended Yale as an undergrad and was part of the storied collegiate a cappella tradition known as 'The Whiffenpoofs.' This is the famous Yale vocal group that has been performing since the Taft administration. Each year, 14 Yale seniors are selected to be 'Whiffs' and, in 1994, Mike was one of them. This group performed concerts all over the country and even overseas, so this — once again — presented Mike with tremendous opportunity not easily replicated elsewhere. He is very clear-eyed and humble in his realization of the opportunities he's had. But, without question, this is a man who has also

worked very hard to make the most of each opportunity placed before him.

The family had relocated from upstate New York in the mid-seventies, where his father had just completed his residency in urology. Mike was three. Effingham turned out to be a real gem overlooked by the elder Nayak's East Coast medical school peers and, here, the hardworking Nayak family found accommodating soil for their new roots. His mother, too, was in private practice with Dr. Huellskoetter in Altamont until 1978 when Mike's brother, Raj, was born. He didn't know it at the time, but a chance encounter with an injured, unconscious motorcyclist in an Illinois cornfield may have determined Mike's professional arc. He was just 16-years-old, out driving with friends when they noticed the out of place, still

lit taillight of the motorcycle wreckage and its rider in the darkness more than a hundred feet from the roadbed. As the boys scrambled toward the man, adrenaline racing, none were armed with any kind of experience to prepare them for what they would find. The man was alive and spontaneously breathing, but had serious facial injuries. They hurriedly dashed to a friend's house, nearby, to call for help. Mike was deeply concerned for the man's wellbeing but couldn't shake the sight of these facial injuries and imagined how they would alter the man's life upon recovery from his other injuries. It was a watershed moment.

“Growing up in Effingham gave me an amazing range of opportunity.”

- Mike Nayak

Fast forward to 2004, as Mike is completing his training as a Fellow — the process of further specialization within a medical specialization following a Residency. An admired professor utters the eminently quotable words, “Live your life like an electron; follow the path of least resistance.” This is not about taking the easy path. This is about walking through sensible doorways. It’s about not wasting time or energy battering down doors, which are firmly shut. For Mike, after his time at Yale, that doorway had been Medical School at Washington University in Saint Louis followed by a Residency at Harvard. Whether these doorways were

opened by a chance encounter with an injured motorcyclist in a field 16-years earlier or the result of incremental adjustments to his trajectory is hard to say, but it led him to the field of facial cosmetic surgery. Mike has helped thousands of patients with everything from severe facial disfigurement to classic rhinoplasties and chin implants. In 1999, 5 years before he’d even completed his training, he purchased the domain for AvaniDaySpa.com. His vision for what he would do, professionally, was already in play.

Today, he and his wife, Avani, have realized that vision through their highly regarded and much sought after work. The Nayak’s practice is routinely rated as the top plastic surgery provider in the St. Louis metropolitan area, but that’s not the half of it. Patients routinely fly-in from Dallas, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, and even L.A., perhaps the plastic surgery capital of America. And there’s a good reason for that. Mike knows his stuff— he REALLY knows his stuff. He is an innovator in the craft, a leader among leaders in his field, and someone with much more than the requisite medical background to perform surgery. He is someone with extraordinary interests and commensurate skills which he has been cultivating since he was a 12-year-old boy stretching his mind through night classes at Lake Land College in Effingham. He is an artist, an educator, a



surgeon, a comforter, a strategist, and a person genuinely committed to serving people. He is, in a very real sense, the sum total of all who lent him their shoulders upon which to stand as he strived to see further, a good number of them, Effinghamians.

Mike sees life alternately through a very practical lens and a sophisticated, even philosophical one. Both lenses serve him well, and when I ask him for the words of wisdom he might share with his own children, ages 15 and 18, he reminds me about his professor’s electron theory, and says that he would encourage them to follow their interests and live in the present — that 80% of their energy should be spent on the next few days;

that to dwell too much in the past can cause depressive feelings. But that living too far into the future can create false optimism often tinged with a kind of anxiety. “Every phase of life has its difficulties and its delights,” he tells me, “But every season has its merits too. Enjoy them all, I would tell them.”

From his beginnings in Effingham, Mike has made a positive dent in the world, but in his own words, it would not have been possible without the substantial foundation he was given in Effingham.

To learn more about Mike, his practice, and his work, go to www.nayakplasticsurgery.com or hit him up on Facebook.

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been a straight or an easy path. As a Junior in high school, she had a serious falling out with her best friend, a girl she'd grown-up with. She says it was just 'silly girl stuff,' but it is clear that this was a hard loss for her.

Junior year is usually the most challenging year in high school already, and this made it that much more challenging for Isabella. While she still had friends, she really missed her bestie. Recovering the friendship was clearly important to them both and, as it turns out, their reconciliation has led to them becoming college roommates this fall in Edwardsville. Beyond the nearly year-long hiatus from her best friend, the junior year and ramp-up to college applications also taxed her in surprising ways she hadn't seen coming.

I asked Isabella how she would advise her younger self and she said, "Knowing now what I know, I'd definitely tell my younger self to work hard in school and be sure to manage your time well — I could have done much better — but don't spend so much energy worrying about your grades. If you manage your time and efforts, your grades will take care of themselves; spend more energy with your friendships and learn to relax a little."

Time management has been a priority for Isabella for years. She's seen it modeled in her family by her father — a firefighter, her mother — a caseworker for Head Start, and through her own experiences as a full-time student,

a volunteer at the Effingham County Humane Society and a member of the competitive cheer team. Life can fill-up pretty quickly, but managing our time and finding a passion to launch into is a wonderful lesson for us all. Isabella thinks she's found hers and is excited to dig in and launch at Edwardsville this Fall. 🌈

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remember, she wanted to work with animals. And then one day, that all changed.

She and two other Health Occupations students had been invited to scrub-up and join the surgical suite at the local hospital as a surgeon performed an unnamed, but 'particularly gory' procedure. At the first sight of blood, two of the three students made their polite, but shaken exit. Neither of them were Ellie. Nope, Ellie stayed for the entirety of the procedure and decided then and there that she was hooked. She would become a nurse.

Ellie heads to Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville this Fall and will be rooming with two of her friends from EHS. They say empathy, kindness, and compassion are in short supply in our modern world. Through her passion for helping others, Ellie Waymoth will be working to amply restock those shelves. 🌈

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The advertisement features a woman in a patterned top looking upwards and to the right. Surrounding her are several icons: a palm tree, a car, a house, a family, a person with a heart, and the Eiffel Tower. The background is a gradient of light green and yellow.

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