

# Flossmoor's Liam Nelson is named National Merit finalist

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Liam Nelson of Flossmoor, a student at the Illinois Math and Science Academy, has been named a National Merit finalist.

The designation puts Liam among the top 1% of high school seniors selected for the honor based on his 2020 PSAT/NMSQT exam taken as a junior. Judging for the finalist designation was based on Liam's academic record, activities at school and in the community, leadership abilities and honors and awards.

He is now eligible for scholarships awarded through the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

Liam, 16, plans to major in aerospace engineering. He hasn't made a college selection yet, but his career goal is to work for SpaceX or the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

His aptitude for math was recognized in second grade while a student at Western Avenue School. In third grade, teachers started giving him algebra work. By the time he was in eighth grade at Parker Junior High, he had completed courses in algebra and geometry and was taking calculus at Homewood-Flossmoor High School.

Upon graduation from Parker, he was accepted as a student at the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora. The academy doesn't admit freshmen, so Liam entered as a sophomore. He will graduate June 4.

He credits his teachers at Western and Parker for helping stimulate his interest in math.

"It was definitely a big part of me getting here," he said.

Liam also credits his parents, Cameron Nelson, a mechanical engineer and attorney, and Michelle Nelson, a civil engineer and mayor of Flossmoor.

"My parents are the main reason I started taking higher level math," he said. He remembers them encouraging him, as a second grader, to do computer math programs.

His dad got him interested in robotics and that led to Liam's interest in engineering. His dad also got Liam in his workshop where together they built cabinets and furniture.

His dad coached his robotics teams based at the Homewood Science Center, first in Lego competitions and then FIRST Tech Challenge. The robotics club gives young students



Liam Nelson

a chance to design, build and program robots for competition. Liam's team went to state competitions three times.

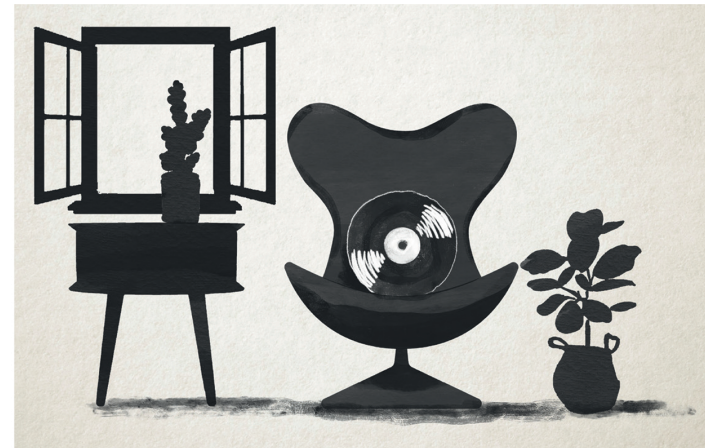
"I really like designing stuff and seeing my design put into reality and doing something cool," he said.

When he got to the Illinois Math and Science Academy, he competed at the next level at FIRST Robotics Challenge. The team was designated for world competition, but that was canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions. Liam is now on an IMSA team that will compete in March.

When IMSA classes went virtual last year, Liam again built a robot for entry at FIRST Tech Challenge.

"Learning from home last year, it was helpful because I got to do some automated parts manufacturing instead of just (using) hand tools," he said.

This school year he ran cross country for the IMSA track team, and he is a member of the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra's jazz band playing trumpet.



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