

Write to win that scholarship

AS a young professional, I savor this time of year.

Not because harvest is getting ready to begin. I savor it for a more selfish reason: School is back in session. I still consider myself young enough to take satisfaction as students head back into the halls of learning. After all, for three long months they've enjoyed staying up late, lounging by the pool and worrying about very little in general — while the rest of us slave away in the real world.

Now, before you students call me a cynical old man, let me get to the point. This column is designed to help you. Specifically, it's designed to help high school seniors who will soon enter the



For Starters

By JOSH FLINT

scholarship application phase of life.

As you begin visiting university campuses, you'll notice the beautiful architecture, the camaraderie, the average class size, dormitory conditions, etc. While you're on that tour, take a look at your father. I can guarantee there's one thought going through his mind: "How much is this going to cost me?" Therefore, help ease dear old Dad's fears, and get to work on those scholarship applications.

Seven essay tips

Almost any scholarship worth a significant amount of money will have an essay portion. Grades, accolades and community involvement are all important. However, the essay can provide some real insight as to your personality. This leads to my first tip.

1 Don't be boring. Whether you're writing an essay, article or novel, I think this is the most challenging ob-

stacle. You have to catch the evaluator's attention and hold it. Plus, you don't want folks to equate a boring essay with a boring applicant.

2 Don't prattle on about your accolades. For the past couple of years I've judged essays for the Farm Credit Services of Illinois' scholarship program. Inevitably, some students see the essay as an opportunity to rattle off their list of achievements. This is boring (see above).

3 Spelling and grammar count. It seems Facebook, Twitter and texting have given birth to some sort of alien shorthand language. Unfortunately, it seems to promote an attitude that syntax doesn't matter, just as long as you get the message across.

4 Appearance matters. Unless Times New Roman flows perfectly from your hand, I'd suggest using a printer for your essay. Also, consider the appearance of the words on the paper. Believe me, a 400-word paragraph is never a good idea. Break it up into paragraphs.

5 Be concise and direct. This is a difficult one. Basically, you should always try to get your point across in the least amount of words. For example, instead

New feature

CCHECK out our new feature called Prairie Appraisal (Page 66). Over the past few months, we've worked hard to amass a team of experts to provide us with land value data they're encountering on a daily basis. Each month, the experts will call out noteworthy sales from their area.

of "Throughout the years, I've learned a lot from the teachings of my father, who has farmed for many years," go with "A lifelong farmer, my father has taught me a lot over the years."

6 Consider a little research. Actual numbers can spice up an essay. Consider this sentence: "Corn prices have really gone up a lot in the past five years." After a Google search and a few minutes on the USDA Web site, you could insert real numbers. "In 2003, the average farm price for corn was \$2.32 per bushel. Last year, the average price was \$4.20."

7 Always have an editor. Before you mail off the application, have someone read it over. If it makes sense to them, it will make sense to the judges. Another set of eyes is always good for catching errors.

I hope these tips help you craft a masterpiece that propels your application to the top. Believe me, your dad will be grateful.

We want to hear from you!

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All letters must include your name, address and telephone number for verification purposes.

Please limit your comments to 300 words or less.



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