

Meet valedictorian Erika Shellenberger

By Riley Eubanks

Noticeably tan from spring break, likely a result from extended practices of her golf swing, valedictorian **Erika Shellenberger** sports a purple quarter-zip track pullover with her hair pulled back, showing off her light blue eyes and a near-constant smile.

Her letter jacket, embroidered with a slew of accolades from high school, sits next to her, both as a reminder of her commitment to Perry and to protect her from the deceptively cool April mornings.

Shellenberger recounted a time when she was younger when she listed that becoming a valedictorian was one of her goals in a questionnaire, even though she couldn't spell it at the time.

"She's naturally brilliant," says coach **Andy Sebold**, "but she works a lot at it. She practices her golf swing like she does her classwork."

Sebold notes how Shellenberger inherited a young team, becoming the oldest player on the team after her sophomore year, and how being forced to step up helped her become the leader she is today. Sebold says she utilizes this leadership in the classroom, too.

"I never had an issue balancing golf and academics, only because I was determined to stay up as late as needed to get my homework done. I was willing to put in the effort to go all the way. If I had to stay up 'till midnight I figured 'Well, looks like I'm staying up 'til midnight.'"

She says that her work ethic might be strengthened by the fact that her family, which includes two triathlete competitors, doesn't keep a TV in their house.

"I get things done rather quickly."

If Shellenberger had a defining sentence, "I get things done rather quickly" might be the one, especially since she plans on getting her master's degree in civil engineering from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University at Daytona Beach in *four* years.

This is made possible through Embry-Riddle's accelerated five-year master's program and the fact that Shellenberger has already qualified for 20 college credit hours, almost equivalent to two full semesters of college. This isn't counting the six AP credits she may earn from her May exams.



Early in her last semester of high school, Erika was named valedictorian of the class of 2017 with a 4.638 grade point average. Though this prestigious accomplishment required a lot of hard work, she never set off on a maniacal pursuit for the crown. "I never scheduled my classes to be valedictorian or anything."

Longtime boyfriend and fellow golf star Nick Osterburg has seen a tremendous amount of growth in Erika's golf skills, but says he's never seen a change in her academic stride because she's "always" been above par on that aspect. Shellenberger plans to play golf as part of the university's NCAA II team while pursuing a career in civil engineering. "I think it'll be a good fit" (Photo provided by Erika Shellenberger).



Carper has stayed busy outside of the classroom, spending two years on the FOCUS staff, participating in Creative Writing Club, the boys volleyball team and several theater productions (Photo provided by Patrick Carper).

Carper crowned salutatorian

By Riley Eubanks

Soon after salutatorian **Patrick Carper** obtained his first cell phone in eighth grade, he programmed his ringtone vibration to reflect the exact morse code for any sort of alert.

For example, whenever Carper gets a text, his phone vibrates: "- .- .- .-", which is morse code for the word "text." He has a similar setup for calls and emails.

It is this attention to detail that hinted at Carper's success, once he enrolled at Perry Meridian after attending St. Barnabas, a private Catholic school, on and off since kindergarten.

"I think going from out of the frying pan and into the fire was beneficial for me," says Carper, who was nicknamed "Patty Ice" by his peers shortly after his arrival.

"Going to Perry where you can really be who you want to be was beneficial to me as a person. It was such a shift. It rocked my world."

The "Ice" in Patty Ice was in reference to the cold nature of Carper's demeanor and his objective philosophy on life, specifically relating to his fascination with the literature of Ayn Rand, the founder of the Objectivism philosophy.

After the first semester of his freshman year, Carper said he was astounded to learn he was the top-

ranked student of the class of 2017.

"I did not see myself as one of those people who in the upper echelon of the class. I saw that '1' and thought, 'Well, I might as well keep it up.'"

Five semesters later, Carper ranked fifth, but he worked his way back up to be named salutatorian with a 4.5987 grade point average.

"He seems to be wise beyond his years. It's kind of miraculous to see what he does," said math department head and longtime mentor Chris Allen, who accompanied Carper to the Top 40 Honors Banquet in March.

In Allen's calculus class, Carper impressed his teacher with questions that related to the concept of math rather than the typical general math questions.

"He has all the qualities to be successful. The young man works his tail off," Allen said.

But he says his success at physical fitness is his most important high school accomplishment.

He works out religiously at the YMCA, and friends and teachers have observed how his arms now include bulging biceps.

"I never was the top dog [growing up]," says Carper, who began to take serious strides in his physical routine about a year ago.

"My body genetically does not want to be a top dog, so I have to do everything I can to change my path," he said.

"There too often exists a schism between fitness and academics. Some lift hard while some study hard. It doesn't have to be that way," says Carper, who believes lifting "sharpens your wits" and "widens your awareness."

Because he is a year older than most in his class (he turned 19 in April), Carper compares his accomplishments to those who are the same age as him, most of whom have already graduated.

"I always had this mentality that I was behind the pack in everything. I used that mentality throughout all of high school. I thought for my age I should've been more advanced. That is what drove me to this height."

"I think if I didn't have that pressure, I would've turned out differently."

Carper plans on going to Wabash College and double major in economics and math.

He has pledged to Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity and plans on pursuing a career in the Congressional Budget Office, which he says is "a beacon of austerity in a fiscal wasteland."