

Cornerstone's Brainy Beau

By David Krone

Steven McFarland graduated June 12, as student council vice president, basketball champion, soccer MVP and valedictorian of Cornerstone Christian Academy 8th grade class of '07.

He recently stepped into the Globe Times office with a exuberant smile to talk about his experiences at Cornerstone, the reasons for his success and his plans for the future.

The primary reason behind his success, said McFarland, was "God."

Born in North Philadelphia and raised in Southwest Philadelphia since the age of three, McFarland grew up in a "sound church home," according to his mother, Marcella McFarland. Currently, he lives with her and his brother Gregory McFarland, who also graduated from Cornerstone in 2004. Steven and his family attend the International City Community Church on 69th Street and Elmwood Avenue, where he has been an usher for the past seven years.

His faith, said McFarland, has given him the confidence to do all things.

"It's like that piece of scripture," said McFarland. "Faith is

the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' It's pretty much believing the impossible, doing the impossible."

While not impossible, the first experiences at Cornerstone were challenging, said McFarland. McFarland entered Cornerstone Christian Academy as a 5th grader in 2003. Unlike the public school system, where teachers assigned less homework and a grade of 92 earned an "A," Cornerstone teachers dished out assignments Monday through Friday and grudgingly admitted a "B" to students earning a 92. McFarland adds, however, that despite being tough, teachers were very supportive.

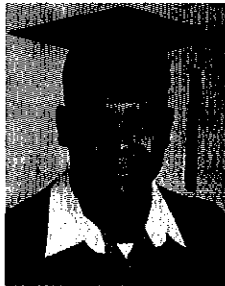
"I didn't know it would be that difficult," said McFarland, "but I knew it was warm and nurturing because my brother went there."

By the 6th grade, McFarland had grown accustomed to the rigorous workload and had come to know his classmates well. He worked hard to maintain his workload in spite of distractions - going out, playing video games, losing interest. His favorite subject became civics, where he studied the Dec-

laration of Independence, the Mayflower Compact, and the nation's founding values.

McFarland said his most memorable moments were with Gary Cammisa, the reading teacher. Camissa taught stories and biblical proverbs such as Mark 3:86 which reads: "does it profit you to gain the whole world and still lose your soul?"

"That story is big because of what the world says," said McFarland. "You can be a rapper,



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Apart from these studies, he also joined the basketball team, which required him to wake up at six o'clock every morning for practice, and the soccer team, which held practice after school. McFarland and his basketball team eventually won the Philadelphia Area Christian Schools Athletic Conference (PACSAC)

basketball league championship during this past season.

"It was the first time since Mr. Harper (the coach) has been here that he had a team where no one was above 5-10," said McFarland. "We were able to come together, though. We even beat the team from Timothy Academy with a guy over 6-3."

McFarland graduated two weeks ago along with the rest of his class. As Valedictorian, he gave a speech during graduation ceremonies entitled, "Dream big, not small, because dreams will take you very far," in which he encouraged his fellow classmates to shrug off pride and temptation and follow their dreams for the

glory of God.

McFarland will attend Bodine High School for International affairs this coming fall. Bodine is a magnet school located at 4th and George Streets in Center City Philadelphia. McFarland chose the school because of its emphasis on travel and business law, but also because he wanted to venture out and attend a different school than his brother, Gregory, who attends Philadelphia Mennonite

High School.

McFarland gave thanks to all his family members for their support, including his brother, his mother, his sister, Marlayne Armstrong, and especially his grandparents, Marvin and Welda McFarland. His grandmother, he said, brought strength, love, and what he called the "x factor, a combination of wisdom, stories, charisma and comedy. McFarland called his grandfather, who unfortunately passed away the past year, "my best friend."

"I could talk to him about anything," said McFarland. "He told me I could do anything."

McFarland said he wanted to eventually be a U.S. Supreme Court judge, return to Southwest and open a recreation center where kids can play and do homework without the fear of violence.

He said that the most important lesson other students growing up in Southwest Philadelphia should learn is to never give up.

"It's like that movie, The Pursuit of Happiness," said McFarland. "People can't do something themselves, they wanna tell you that you can't do it. You want something? Go get it. Period."