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The sky's the limit

Nestor Levin becomes first Blind Brook graduate of this millennium to attend a U.S. Service Academy

BY JAMIE KERNER

Just like many students, Nestor Levin experienced feelings of agitation and suspense as he waited to hear back from the colleges he applied to.

"I was very, very nervous," Levin, a member of Blind Brook High School's Class of 2018, said. "Like every day, I would question what the hell am I doing with my life."

But the jitteriness and stress associated with his anticipation went away in early January when Levin received an acceptance letter from his dream school, the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado.

"It was like a New Year's present," Levin said. "It felt really good."

Going to the Air Force Academy is something he has always wanted to do.

"The more I looked into the research about it, the more I fell in love with it and felt that I had a place there because it had all the things I would want," he said. "It's not just a typical school, it's a lifestyle that's cultivated there."

Between his strong academic performance in high school and his talent and love for fencing, which ultimately led to his recruitment, Levin's dream became a reality.

Levin, who joined the school district when he was in 10th grade, credits Blind Brook with helping him build his strong work ethic, which he says further propelled him to where he is going. Before



Blind Brook graduate Nestor Levin watches a fencing match in gear at the 2016 USA Fencing National Championships & July Challenge in Dallas, Tex.

COURTESY OF NESTOR LEVIN



Blind Brook High School graduate Nestor Levin is preparing to attend the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado this fall.

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moving to Blind Brook, he attended a school in the Bronx and then Iona Preparatory School in New Rochelle.

"I wish I settled in quicker instead of taking as long as I did," Levin said. "But other than that, I'm pretty happy with how the last three years have turned out, both athletically, academically, socially at school."

According to Dr. Colin Byrne, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for the Blind Brook School District, Levin is the only Blind Brook graduate in this millennium to attend a U.S. Service Academy.

Applying to the Academy

To apply to any of the U.S. service academies, Levin explained, a candidate must secure a nomination from a nominating authority such as a senator or congressperson. Levin received his nomination from Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY 17th District).

Levin was one of the 16 students from Westchester County Lowey nominated for admission to the five U.S. service academies last December and was honored at her annual Service Academy Recognition Ceremony on Apr. 23.

In addition to obtaining a nomination, candidates must apply to the actual academy itself, just as they would for any other school. Levin began this process towards the end of his junior year of high school and continued it through that summer and the beginning of his senior year.

Like many incoming freshmen, Levin is not sure of what he wants to study at school. However, he is thinking of majoring in either chemistry or political science and is interested in minoring in Russian.

Levin said there are plenty of different career paths in the Air Force that he could take associated with each major. Furthering the chemistry major would allow him to work as a scientist for the Air Force, whereas following the political science

major would give him an opportunity to work as a foreign area officer.

A fondness for fencing

Looking back on his college application process, Levin said he had a feeling early on that he would get accepted into the Air Force Academy.

"Through fencing and being recruited, I also had a little bit of reassurance that maybe I could do it," Levin said.

Before he was officially accepted into the Air Force Academy, Levin received a letter of assurance from the school.

"It's a letter that you get that says that the Academy is willing to take you a little bit earlier, sort of like an early decision but not really, not formally," Levin explained. "As long as you get your nominations and as long as you're medically clear, which is a third separate process, then you're good to go. But that's just saying that as far as the school goes that you're clear for that and they'll take you."

Levin currently fences for the Fencing Academy of Westchester in Hawthorne and has been with that club since he first started out in the sport. Due to time conflicts, he will be unable to compete in the National Championships this year, which are being held from June 28-July 7, as he had to report to the Air Force Academy on June 28.

"That was a little bummer," Levin said. "But still, there's plenty more after that."

Parting advice

Levin believes it's critical for students to focus on making themselves unique. He says they should try to stand out and have their own "thing," just as he did with fencing.

"Focus on things that will make you stand out," he said. "Become a master in one or two things instead of mediocre in like 20 different things. That's a big point that I would get across."

Additionally, Levin advises that prospective service academy students understand that service is inevitable after college. As service academy education is tuition-free, students are required to serve time. The length of commitment for service depends on an individual's career path as well as other opportunities that may arise.

"Yeah, it's college, but still, that's ultimately the reason we're there," Levin said. "That's what it's preparing you for, and that's the type of lifestyle you're going for, so just be ready for that, just know why you're there."