Ellen O’Brien Leaves Legacy At Mahopac High School

By Eric Gross

Ellen O’Brien, a 2019 graduate of Mahopac High School who this week begins her freshman year at Manhattan College, has been named as one of five nationwide ‘Glammy’ Scholarship Award recipients by a nonprofit called Glamour-Gals, an organization that combats elder isolation while inspiring teen leaders to assist the aged in senior homes and residential settings.

Three years ago, Ellen was contacted by a classmate at MHS who needed assistance in forming a new club that was being created to assist the over 65 set.

During a recent interview, Ellen, who concluded a counseling position earlier this month at Camp Combe in Putnam Valley, said the club’s role was to “visit senior citizens at different centers and besides socializing with the elderly, paint their nails and provide them with makeovers.”

Ellen recalled her first visit to a center: “It was a sunny Saturday in March – just as spring was trying to overcome winter. There were buds of tulips trying to peek through the dirty snow that blanketed the ground by the entrance to the senior home. It was 1:45 pm and when I strolled into the community room which was set up with nail polish and make-up. One woman wheeled herself over to me in a wheelchair, picked

a spot right next to me. She smiled a warm friendly smile while her green eyes twinkled. She started talking about the weather, where I go to school, my age and the subjects I enjoyed most. The second she began talking, I recognized a distinct accent. I told her my favorite subject in school was German and at that moment, her eyes lit up and she sat higher in her chair.”

Ellen remembered the woman “immediately began speaking in German. During our conversation I learned that she grew up in Austria during the same time Hitler was rising to power in Germany. She escaped Austria with her family before the outbreak of World War II. She told me about the willingness of many people who helped her – all from different communities and cultures because they were all united under one language.”

Ellen noted: “Meeting this wonderful woman gave me a new perspective. Though foreign languages have always intrigued me, Elise’s story struck a match on how the true nature of world languages can unite people in a second. Being bilingual or even multi-lingual can help a person gain a deeper understanding of our rapidly changing world and can help break down barriers as a result of cultural differences.”

Ellen, who speaks fluent Spanish as well as German and English, helped to create the club at MHS boasting 45 members since its inception. It visits the William Koehler Senior Center in Mahopac as well as the Waterview Hills Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Purdys-North Salem.

Now that Ellen has left the local chapter in Mahopac in good hands, she intends to start a new club at Manhattan College where she is majoring in early and special education.

Elizabeth Meacham of Glamour-Gals commended Ellen for “empowering her peers, making an impact in her community and finding confidence in herself.”

The soft-spoken college freshman said while she had been recognized on the national level, “our club was a team effort. If it wasn’t for Jenna Vitale, Gemma Franzetti, Gianna Gervasi, Alisha Mendez, Svitlana Malishko, Julianna Mendez, Katie Jusino, Hailey Martinez and our advisor Cynthia Colbrook none of this would have occurred.”