

An elementary impact

GHS top scorers credit first grade teacher

When considering who impacted them most, graduating seniors most often name high school teachers.

This well-deserved praise is, in all likelihood, limited in scope by memory—those who have taught and guided them most recently are the first in mind, and any deserving teachers they knew in elementary school go unmentioned; even at 17, first grade can seem a bit hazy.

That, however, isn't the case for this year's valedictorian and salutatorian. In separate interviews, without knowing the questions in advance, both Brian Nardone and Emily McFadden immediately named the same elementary school teacher: Mrs. Spina.

Jennifer Spina taught both Emily and Brian in first and second grade.

"From a young age, she always instilled in us to do our best," said Brian, this year's valedictorian.

"She transferred from first to second grade with us," said Emily, this year's salutatorian. "She would come to all of our games—she put our soccer schedule on her schedule," said Emily. "She would invite us to see her daughter's dance recitals."

Mrs. Spina also had the opportunity to have a more recent impact on the students—she joined them on a school trip to Europe in the summer of 2019.

"She chaperoned for my group, which was me and my classmates who

were in her class in second grade," said Brian. "It was just really fun doing all that again."

"She said, 'I'm the momma duck, and you're my ducklings,'" Emily recalled. "She just created such a family—we're still in contact."

Other teachers earned mention—Jeff Dunham, Kirsten Abbott, Ryan DeWolfe—and both students insisted it was a struggle to name only a few.

"There's just so many, I can't name them all," said Emily. "There's so many who have brought me out of my shell."

"I can't keep it down to only a special few," said Brian.

Brian Nardone, Valedictorian

Brian Nardone, valedictorian of his class, will attend the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) for chemical engineering. He will transition immediately to an RIT graduate program for material science.

"I've always loved science and math," said Brian, adding his father and brothers are all mechanical engi-

neers. "I hope to be able to help with the environment, devising materials that are better for the ecosystem or a new technique to make things that are better for the environment," he said.

Brian advises incoming high school students to make the most of the next four years. "You don't want to look back knowing you didn't do a whole lot," he said.

Brian is the son of Lori and Richard Nardone, and brother of Adam (currently at Clarkson University) and Patrick (currently at Monroe Community College).

Mrs. Nardone is a speech pathologist at Geneva High School; Mr. Nardone is a product specialist at ITT Goulds Pumps.



Emily McFadden, Salutatorian

Emily McFadden, salutatorian of her class, will attend Cornell University in the fall, majoring in plant sciences, with expectations of proceeding to graduate school after that.

"I'm not exactly sure what I want to do yet, but something with agriculture and possibly a conservation concentration," said Emily. "I was really lucky to get an internship at Dr. Larry Smart's lab at Cornell AgriTech," said Emily. "That was really cool to get exposed to agriculture and how big the research industry is," she said, adding her interests are primarily environmentalism and plant conservation. To incoming high school first-years, Emily advises, "create a network of people who are supportive and want to see you do your



best and challenge you, and seek opportunities that are out of your comfort zone."

Emily is the daughter of Ann and Bob McFadden, and sister of sophomore Natalie McFadden. Mrs. McFadden is a preschool teacher at Cozy Days; Mr. McFadden is CEO of Finger Lakes Federal Credit Union.