

# Scholars share smarts — and roots

## Winners were in 1st grade together

By Susan Troller  
*The Capital Times*

It's unusual, and a source of pride, when two Presidential Scholars come from the same city, as only 141 remarkably gifted students are chosen from the entire country.

It's flat out amazing that two Presidential Scholars grew up just blocks from each other, attended the same elementary school and were actually classmates in the same first grade classroom.



Klongland

But that's the case with Robert Marsland, a senior at St. Ambrose Academy, and Mallery Olsen, a senior at Memorial High School, who were named this week for the prestigious award, which is based on exceptional academic achievement, artistic excellence, leadership, citizenship and service at school and in their community.

Marsland, 18, and Olsen, 17, were classmates in MaryAnn Klongland's first grade class at Stephens Elementary School at 120 S. Rosa Road on Madison's west side.

There's more: Olsen named Klongland as the teacher who inspired and challenged her at ages 5 and 6 to set her sights on the stars, and Klongland will accompany Olsen to Washington, D.C., as the Presidential Scholars are honored by the



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**Mallery Olsen's kindergarten and first grade teacher MaryAnn Klongland greeted her with hugs and flowers when she saw her after Olsen was named a 2007 Presidential Scholar.**

U.S. Department of Education between June 23 and June 27.

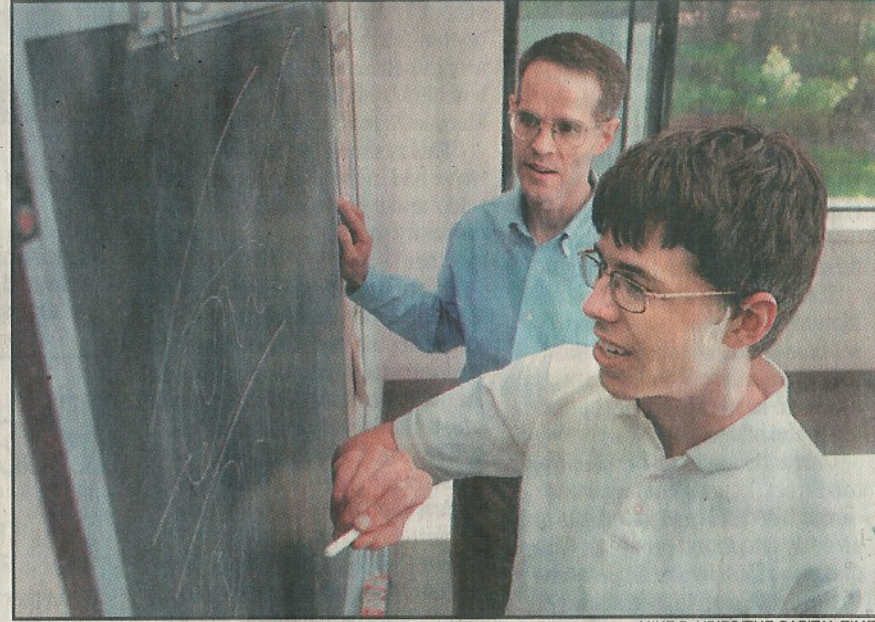
Klongland and Marsland's most inspiring teacher, John Gillett, will be honored with Teacher Recognition Awards from the U.S. Department of Education. Both Klongland and Gillett are from Verona.

Marsland attended public school until fifth grade and then was home-schooled. As a freshman in high school, he began attending tiny St. Ambrose Academy, a conservative Catholic junior high and high school located in the religious education wing of St. Thomas Aquinas on Everglade Drive on Madison's west side.

He nailed Madison's only perfect SAT

score last year and won the nation's first vocabulary bee in New York City earlier this year. He is a principal cellist with the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra as well as an accomplished pianist. He is an Eagle Scout, a church musician, Gold Cross Altar server and Latin tutor. He takes a graduate level physics course at the University of Wisconsin and is a member of a ski club and swim team and loves water-skiing.

But his most influential teacher, John Gillett, who is now the principal at St. Ambrose and who taught Marsland calculus beginning in 9th grade, said his other accomplishments pale beside his



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**Robert Marsland, a 2007 Presidential Scholar, talks about a physics problem with his teacher, John Gillett, who is now principal at St. Ambrose Academy.**

devotion to looking for the truth.

Marsland is interested in the theoretical limits of physics and mathematics and is fascinated by exploring and integrating faith and reason.

He is planning to attend Princeton.

Klongland said that Olsen's entire kindergarten and first grade class was exceptional and that she loved being with the students for two years as they moved from kindergarten to first grade.

Olsen will attend Smith College next year and hopes to eventually go to medical school as an oncologist. Her dream is to work with Doctors Without Borders, and she has done volunteer medical work

in Ecuador. She is the first chair oboist for Memorial's band and orchestra, is captain of the junior varsity softball team and is SCUBA-certified.

An enthusiastic and accomplished member of Memorial's award-winning debate and forensics group, she has been very involved with her school's drama program. She is currently appearing in "A Piece of My Heart," a drama about female Vietnam veterans.

Marsland is the son of Robert and Diane Marsland. Olsen's parents are Claudia Meyers and Chris Olsen.

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