LHS student’s rare opportunity

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The video of Samantha “Sami” opening the acceptance letter from Jefferson College of Health Sciences tells the story pretty well.

After learning of her acceptance into the bachelor’s in emergency services program, the Lakeland High School honor student drops the letter onto the kitchen table and covers her mouth to stifle a scream.

“She lost her mind,” said mom Angie Gizara, who shot the video on her smart phone. “This is her Yale.”

Samantha Gizara has been volunteering for the Holland Volunteer Fire Department for a little more than a year. She has obtained her EMT certification and passed her Firefighter 1 and Hazmat certifications.

“I have always been an adrenaline junkie and always liked helping people, and the fire department gives me the best of both worlds,” Samantha Gizara said, explaining what attracts her to volunteering as a firefighter.
Angie Gizara is especially proud of her daughter because the Jefferson College program is the only one of its kind in America, and the school accepts only 30 students each year for the program.

John Cook, who directs the program at Jefferson College, said that while 13 other emergency services programs exist across the nation, his is the only one that incorporates initial paramedic certification and a dual track where students can specialize in fire or critical care.

Samantha Gizara said she wants to become a flight paramedic while continuing to volunteer as a firefighter. She said she’s “pretty nervous” about moving to Roanoke for the four-year program. “But I think I’m ready for it,” she added.

While maintaining high grades and volunteer firefighting, Gizara has also played travel softball with the Southampton Storm.

Chief Mark Ellis said Holland VFD doesn’t get a lot of female volunteers. Most drop out because of the strenuous training involved, he added.

“Sam is unique,” Ellis said. “She’s been hit in the head with a live hose. She’s stressed herself out several times, but she’s so determined. To the point that she will not give up.”

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