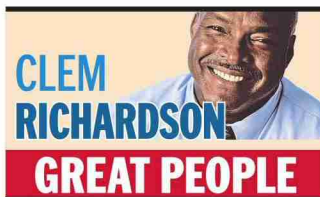


# Navy school next mission for top grad

## Academy was his goal for 4 years



**A**ndrew Paige's Navy career may hinge on whether he can somehow sprout gills this summer.

Either way, come June 30, Paige – a Jamaica, Queens, resident and Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School Class of 2011 graduate – will start his Plebe Summer at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md.

Sometime over the next few years, the 18-year-old will have to decide where his career takes him.

"I don't know what I want to do yet, but right now I'm looking at medicine, flight school, or possibly special operations – Navy SEALs," Paige said.

"You have to be a fish to be a SEAL. I'm not exactly a fish in the water, but maybe I'll sprout some gills."

Paige has worked to get into the Naval Academy since his freshman year the Fort Greene, Brooklyn, school.

At Loughlin, Paige won two scholarships, including the Ray Brustman Scholarship funded by the St. Augustine Diocesan High School Alumni Association, which together paid all his Loughlin costs.

"The husband of one of my mother's friend was in the Army, Paige said. "One day we were talking about the military, and when I told him I didn't like the Army, he said if I was thinking about the Navy then I should go to the Naval Academy.

"I started doing the research, and I liked their history, tradition, everything the Naval Academy entails. I watched videos on YouTube and I found it so amazing that even with the huge responsibility, the students have there they don't seem to lose themselves in the everyday back and forth of college. I love that about the Naval Academy.

"The first day of my sophomore year, I went to the guidance counselor and said I wanted to go to the Naval Academy."

Paige had other inspirations. He was born in East New York, the only child of Willette Hamilton, an executive secretary in a Manhattan real estate law firm. When he was 12 years old, his mother bought a house and they moved to Jamaica.

Paige kept ties to the old neighborhood, so he heard pretty quickly when an old East New York friend died from head injuries he received in a fight that started while he was playing basketball on a local court.

"He got into an argument, and the person bashed his head into the ground a number of times," Paige said.

"He was in the hospital for a while and then he died. He had just graduated high school and was going to college.

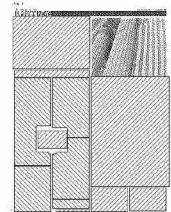
"That showed me life is too short to sit still."

Sitting still is not one of Paige's problems.

The summer before he entered Loughlin, Paige spent 17 days traveling through Australia with dozens of other teens as a student ambassador in the People to People program ([www.peopletopeople.com](http://www.peopletopeople.com)).

"We went to Sydney, then to the Outback, and ended up in Brisbane," he said.

"We did two home stays, one on a farm where the boys slept on one side of the barn and



the girls on the other.”

Between ninth and 10th grades, he attended the YMCA sleep-away Camp Michikamau at Bear Mountain.

I made a lot of friends there,” he said. “Before that, I had never hiked or shot a bow and arrow.”

The summer between 10th and 11th grades, Paige attended the Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership Conference at St. John’s University, not far from his home.

“It was one of the best weekends of my life,” Paige said. “Usually when you interact with people on a daily basis, you’re afraid of making a fool of yourself, but these people did not care. It was just so much fun to be there.”

Last summer, Paige attended Boy’s State, an American Legion sponsored gathering in Morrisville, N.Y., where “they taught you how to be a politician from the bottom up. We did speeches, ran for office. This is where I got most of my confidence, because you had to do campaign speeches

to people you didn’t know.”

He came home and went almost directly to Manhattan College’s two-week Engineering Awareness Program.

“I met a lot of really smart people and decided engineering was not for me,” he said.

From there, Paige went to American University in Washington, where he joined dozens of students from around the country at the Intelligence and National Security seminar sponsored by the National Student Leadership Conference.

An essay Paige wrote at the seminar earned him the right to join three other students in laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Now preparing to leave home for the Naval Academy, Paige is sure he made the right choice for himself and his family.

“My mother is the most important person in my life, hands down,” he said. “I am just glad I don’t have to burden her with paying for my education.”

*crichardson@nydailynews.com*



**Bishop Loughlin Memorial High School Class of 2011 grad Andrew Paige will fulfill his dream and enter U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., on June 30.** Photo by Debbie Egan-Chin/Daily News