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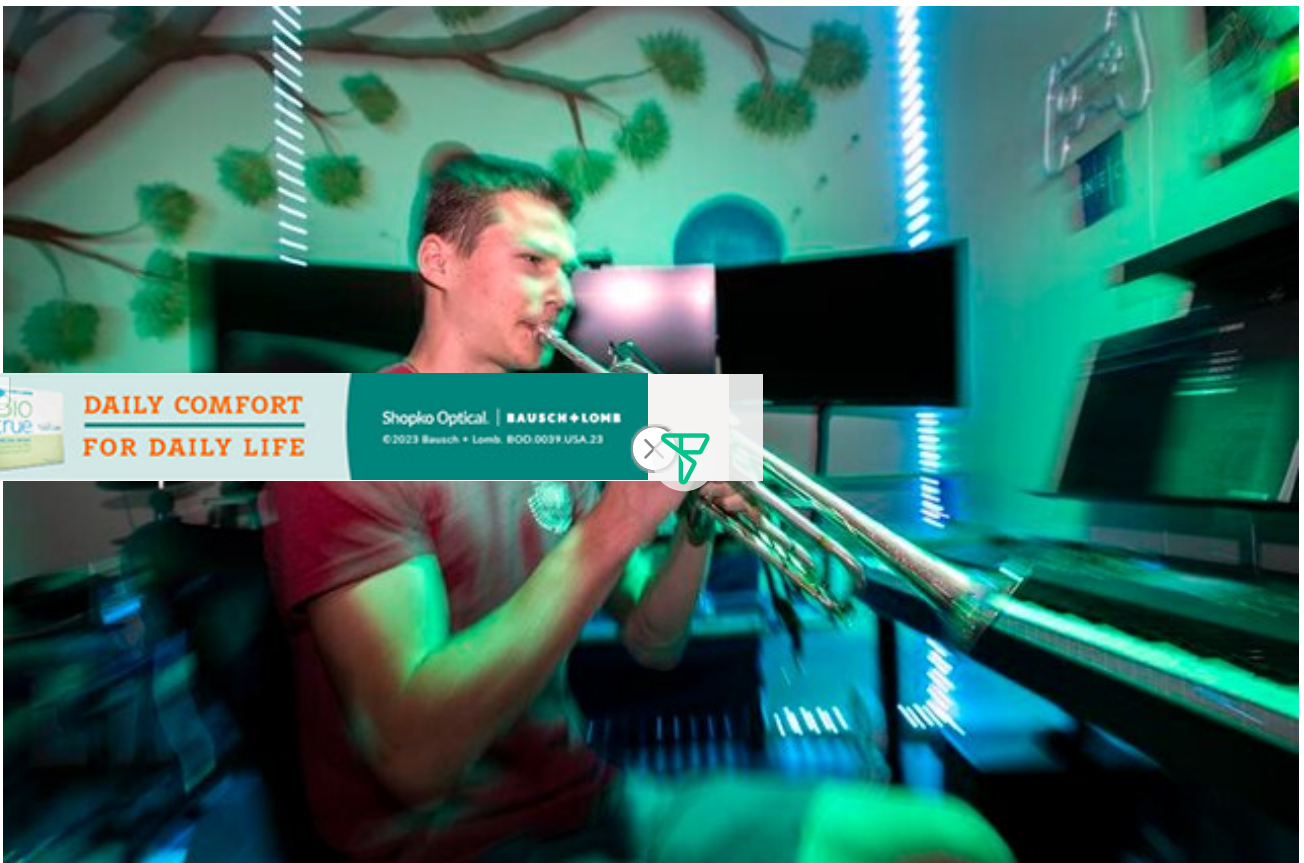
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## Music man: Sterling Newman grad heads to Boston on a high note

By Steve Stein

July 15, 2023 at 7:12 am CDT

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Newman High School student Maxwell DeForest plays a trumpet in the music room of his Dixon home Thursday, June 8, 2023. DeForest will be studying trumpet performance at the New England Conservatory in Boston this fall. (Alex T. Paschal - [apaschal@shawmedia.com](mailto:apaschal@shawmedia.com)/credit)

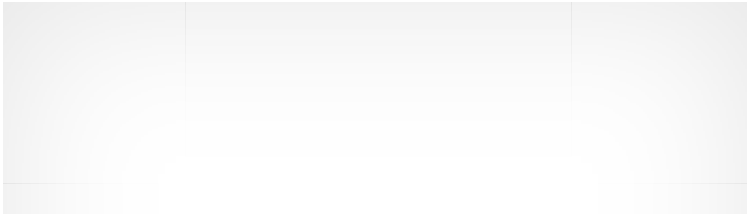
**DIXON – Elite high school athletes go through a grueling, time-consuming recruiting process before choosing their college destination.**

So do elite high school musicians.

Just ask Maxwell DeForest of Dixon, a recent graduate of Sterling Newman Central Catholic. He did 15 pre-screenings (through recorded audio) and earned callbacks for in-person auditions from Illinois, DePaul, Michigan, Iowa, Vanderbilt, Northwestern, Miami (Florida), as well as the Oberlin Conservatory, Berklee College of Music, San Francisco Conservatory, Curtis Music Institute, Julliard School and the New England Conservatory of Music.

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He completed nine pressure-packed live auditions across the country starting Jan. 26 and concluding March 5, and was accepted into five schools. He chose to attend the New England Conservatory, a private school in Boston, where he will major in classical trumpet music performance.

Indiana was the runner-up. He also was accepted at DePaul, Illinois and Miami (Florida).



Dr. David DeForest, Maxwell's father, is a dentist. He accompanied his son on auditions.

"My dad said, hands down, what I had to go through was more difficult than getting into dental school," Maxwell said.

He was competing with the Newman boys cross country team last fall while

practicing the trumpet four hours a day and preparing and doing pre-screening videos. Although running cross country was a “nice break” from his music studies, practicing and performances during his freshman, sophomore and junior years at Newman, it created stress last fall.

But Maxwell fought through it.

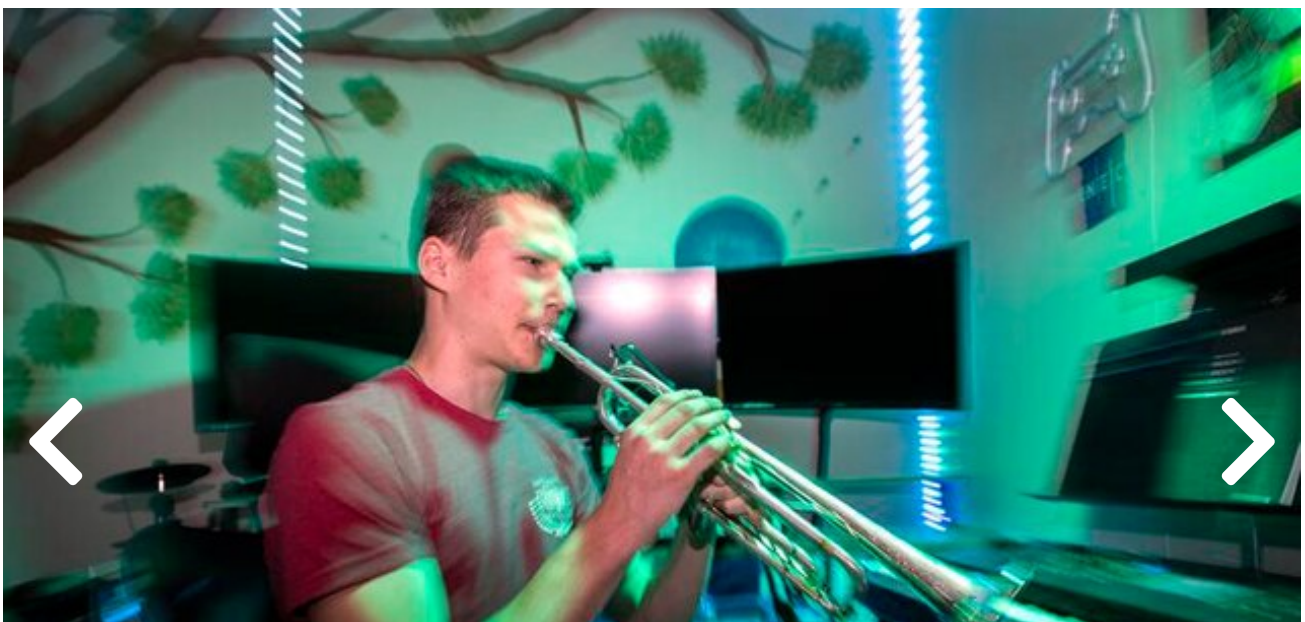
”I’m glad I stuck with it,” he said. “I love running. Plus, people in our family are not quitters. Quitting isn’t an option.”

Maxwell left a music legacy at Newman – which does not have a music department – serving as the de facto music director there for four years, accompanying on the piano during weekly Masses, and providing background music for religious and school events.

He wrote the school’s alma mater and digitized “Newman Loyalty,” the school song, taking music from the 1960s and making an audio recording with his trumpet and piano skills.

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Newman High School student Maxwell DeForest plays a trumpet in the music room of his Dixon home Thursday, June 8, 2023. DeForest will be studying trumpet performance at the New England Conservatory in Boston this fall. (Alex T. Paschal - [apaschal@shawmedia.com](mailto:apaschal@shawmedia.com)/credit)

The New England Conservatory was established in 1867. It's the oldest continuously operating independent music conservatory in the U.S. and among the most prestigious in the world.

Located near Boston Symphony Hall, it's home to about 750 undergraduate and graduate students. Jordan Hall, its primary concert hall, is renowned in the music world for its outstanding acoustic properties.

"NEC gave me the best offer, and it just felt right to go there," Maxwell said. "The big question I asked myself at each school was, 'Do I see myself here?' I did at NEC. I fell in love with Boston."

Maxwell has eight trumpets, including four that he uses regularly for performances. His history with the instrument began when he asked for one when he was 7 years old, and retired music teacher Jim Green agreed to work with him.

"After more than 20 music teachers told me 7 was too young to start as a trumpet student, we were lucky to find Mr. Green," said Carla DeForest, Maxwell's mother. "He started Maxwell's love for music and gave him the foundation he has today. Although his time with Mr. Green was the



shortest Maxwell has spent with a teacher, Mr. Green probably made the biggest impact on Maxwell and is most responsible for where Maxwell is heading today.”

Carla said Green made music fun and challenging, and Maxwell wanted to practice.

”When he was a second grader, Maxwell would practice for 30 minutes before school and up until bedtime in the evening,” she said.

From that point forward, a trumpet, music stand and chair would go with the DeForest family on vacations and family outings.

”Maxwell’s first and last task every day for the past 11 years has been his trumpet,” Carla said. “That can be good and bad at 6 a.m. and 11 p.m.”

Green said Maxwell was his most memorable student, “a joy to teach and a joy to be with,” and he can’t wait to see what’s next for him.

”It’s highly unusual, in my experience, to start at his tender age on an instrument as physically challenging as the trumpet and then watch, dumbfounded, as he continued to thrive on the challenge and excel,” he said. ”When we started composing music, Maxwell showed uncanny instincts, not to mention a high degree of laser-focused resolve, as a composer.”

Linc Smelser, Mark Ponzo and Karl Sievers are among those who also have worked with Maxwell through the years. Smelser is the conductor and music director for the Rockford Symphony Youth Orchestra. Maxwell was

the principal trumpet of the group for several seasons.

”The RSYO is a sizable orchestra with young musicians of diverse experiences and backgrounds,” Smelser said. “In my 20-plus years of conducting youth orchestras, I haven’t experienced an ensemble with more camaraderie and inner support than the RSYO in the last two seasons.

“I attribute much of this to Maxwell’s influence as a brass principal. His humility and drive for excellence made him an ideal role model for his peers.”

Smelser said Maxwell has played with other groups he conducts. He was the principal trumpet for the Northern Illinois University Sinfonia, a high school-aged group, and he was a part-time member of the Kishwaukee Symphony Orchestra, a not-for-profit community orchestra in DeKalb County.

Ponzo, professor of trumpet emeritus at NIU, has known and worked with Maxwell since Maxwell was 9.

He said Maxwell is in the top 1% of the trumpet students he has worked with in 43 years and “one of the great pleasures of my teaching career.”

”Maxwell takes direction well, works hard and strives for perfection in his playing,” he said. “He’s able to manage the most difficult literature, has solid technique and always achieves a high level of musicianship.”

Sievers has been Maxwell’s primary trumpet teacher for more than four years. They meet weekly on Skype because Sievers lives in Norman,

Oklahoma, and teaches at the University of Oklahoma.

”In my 40-plus years as an internationally known trumpet teacher, Maxwell’s talent ranks among the highest I have encountered,” Sievers said. “Further, he is a very nice and likable young man. Maxwell has a great sound, a solid three-octave range and very advanced technique. His interpretation skills are mature, natural and intuitive.”

In addition to being a trumpet teacher, Sievers is the principal trumpet for the Oklahoma City Philharmonic Orchestra.

Maxwell has three siblings: Elizabeth, 29, Alex, 28, and Zachary, 16.

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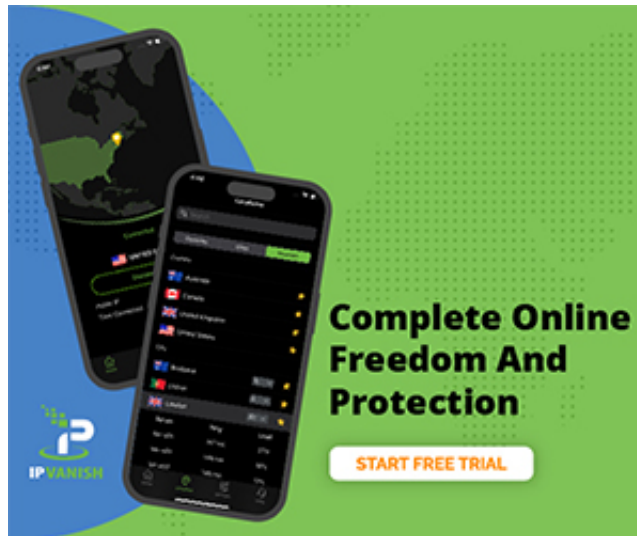
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