Willoughby native represents Ohio

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Staff Writer

When the Democratic National Convention convenes this month in Boston, a 21-year-old Willoughby native will be seated among seasoned veterans to cast his vote.

Daniel Gray, a 21-year-old senior political science major at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, was elected as a delegate to the convention to be held the week of July 26.

Gray will represent Ohio's 14th Congressional District.

Delegates are expected to vote on the position of the Democratic Party on key issues and formally nominate John Kerry for president.

Gray, a 2001 graduate of Hawken School in Chardon Township, said he was studying the nominating process for a college class and thought he might want to get involved.

He logged onto the Ohio Democratic Party Web site and found instructions on how to become a delegate.

"It's an incredibly important election and I wanted to be involved," Gray said. "I found out that it's a pretty easy process in Ohio.

This year the Ohio Democratic Party will send 159 delegates to the national convention, 91 of which are elected. The rest are selected by the party.

Included in those elected to attend are Linda Hiblak, who is deputy director of the Lake County 6th District Board, and Daniel P. Troy, a Lake County commissioner.

Don Trebun, communications director for the Ohio Democratic Party, said the party wants to involve young people such as Gray in the election process.

"We have a diversity plan and we are committed to having a certain number of young, really energetic and engaged Democrats," Trebun said. "We're proud of his work."

Gray, who grew up in Willoughby and recently moved to Cleveland, was elected by fellow registered Democrats.

To drum up support, he threw a dinner party for family and friends who are registered Democrats.

It's no surprise that Gray comes from a politically aware family.

His mother, Joy, and younger brother Matthew, who also attend the University of Maryland, are also volunteers for registered Democrats.

Gray jokes that his father, Marvin, is now the only Republican in the immediate family.

"Now we're up to 4-1 in the household," Gray said. "My mom is a Democrat and my dad is a Republican, so they cancel each other out."

Gray believes his ability to listen to both sides of issues will help secure him a future in politics.

"One gift I get from my parents is that I can listen to an argument and hear both sides," Gray said. "I'm interested in knowing why other people have their opinions. A lot of people will only listen to their side. I can at least try to understand where the other side is coming from, which is something that's very lacking in politics today."

To help in paying for his trip, Gray was awarded a $1,600 scholarship from the new Experiential Learning Fellowship program at Case Western.

While he's not working as a research assistant in the political science department at Case Western, Gray enjoys playing bass and singing in the punk rock band "Dead by July."

Although Gray has not yet narrowed down his plans for the future, he knows they will include politics. He doesn't rule out the possibility of running for president.

"I want to get involved in politics, involved in elections and running for office, maybe," Gray said. "It's a far-fetched goal, but sure, I'd like to try for president one day."