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## STELLAR STUDENT

# Not even a staycation for this teen

Southland senior trades break for research project

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There were no lazy summer days for Tiffany Hill during her so-called vacation between her junior and senior years at Southland College Prep Charter High School in Richton Park. That's because Hill participated in an eight-week research apprentice program so she could keep busy.

"A friend and I were talking about doing something productive over the summer. We decided to do a program where you could experience college life and do something pertaining to school," said Hill, 17, who has a 4.65 grade-point average and is tied for the No. 1 rank in her class. "I found this program at the University of Illinois. I applied for it; they called me and I got in."

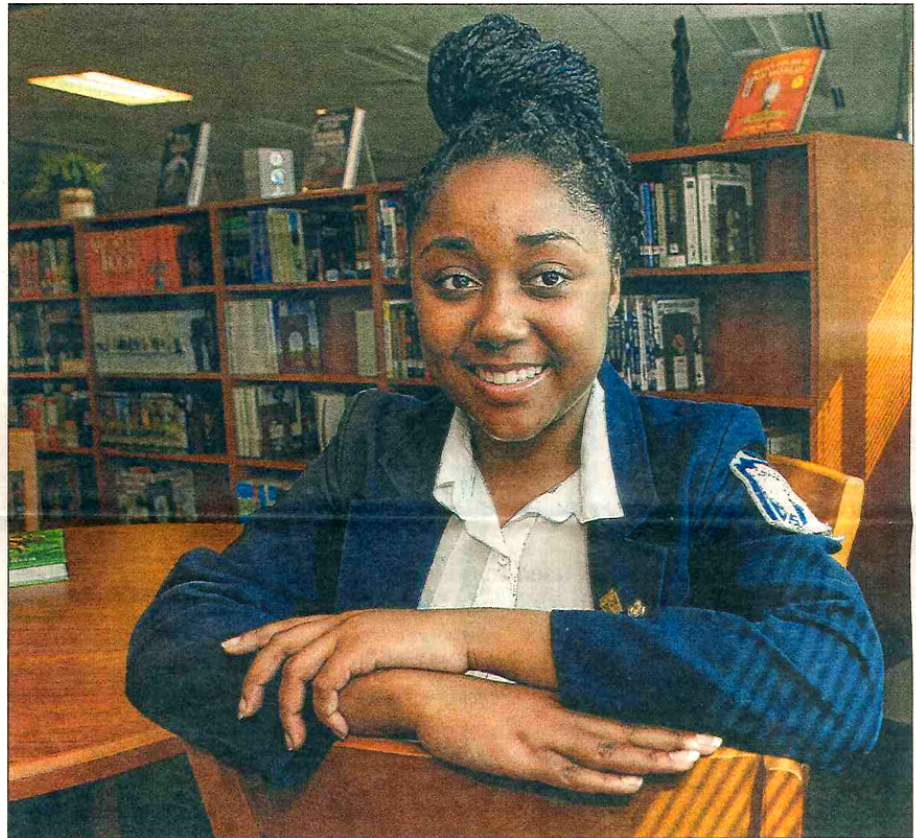
The eight-week research program has students working with professors and graduate students in the department of natural resources and environmental science. Hill was told to research agricultural sustainability in urban gardens of Chicago.

"A graduate student came up with the topic and I got to work on it for eight weeks," said Hill, who spent her days in the lab. "My main issue was to find out if there were heavy metals in the soil that would harm the environment."

At the end of the project, Hill had to create a presentation on what she learned, write a paper and present it to a group of about 100, which consisted of 57 of her peers, plus professors and judges.

"I discovered there are heavy metals in urban gardens, which means the soil may be toxic," she said. "There weren't large amounts, but there were traces that could indicate that there is a trend in community gardens that needs further research."

Hill left for the program June 15 and returned home Aug. 2, giving



Tiffany Hill is tied for the top ranking in her class at Southland College Prep Charter High School.

[SUPPLIED PHOTO BY JOHN SMIERCIAK]

her just a couple of weeks before starting her senior year.

She has no regrets.

"I really enjoyed it," she said. "It was something that was so great for me. I got to experience college life and I made a lot of connections. It was really good for me."

At Southland College Prep, she is the president of the National Honor Society and a member of Interact, a volunteer organization, chorus, student council and media club.

She would like to attend Northwestern University and is considering pursuing a career that mixes business and environmental science.

"Ideally, I'd like to find some-

thing to correlate both of those fields. If so, that would be great. I want to be successful," she said.

Meanwhile, she's nervous and excited about the college application process.

"It is my main focus right now and I'm really excited about that," she said.

Hill said her family helps her maintain her drive to succeed.

"When I think about my family and all the responsibilities I have, it gives me motivation to do well in school," she said. "I want to work hard and I love being challenged."

Her parents, Paul and Alisa Hill, of Matteson, are her mentors.

"They help me through every-

thing and support me in everything I do. My parents are my biggest supporters," she said. "I try hard for them. I want to be successful; I always keep that in the back of my head."

Her siblings push her, too. Hill is the youngest of three, behind Ariel, 28, and Paul Jr., 19.

"I want to do well for them, too," she said.

She also gives plenty of credit to her school.

"Southland is a big part of my life," she said. "I go to school nine hours a day and I've been able to stay on top of my grades. It has played a very important role in my life."