

Volume 2, Issue 7
OCT./NOV. 2011



BECOMING YOUR BEST

Stories Of Hope And Encouragement

Becoming Your Best Newsletter

Greetings,

Dedication and persistence are two words that come to mind when I think of those who work in the field of special education. It takes special people to answer this calling. It is certainly not about becoming rich and famous because that will never happen. For many, it is about making a difference in the lives of others. It is about making a difference for those who have special needs.

Our two articles in this issue are examples of the dedication and persistence of special individuals who are making a difference in the lives of those with special needs.

Our first story is about the difference a group of educators are making in the lives of students with hearing impairments. They are teaching on a very practical level to help the students to understand their disability. This is helping the students to develop more awareness and to help build their self-confidence.

Our second story is about a young lady who has been able to accomplish something neither she nor her mother would have ever dreamed possible. She competed in the N.C. Special Olympics Equestrian Competition, with the assistance of her former teacher and classroom assistant. The pictures with this story exemplify the difference that was made in this young lady's life by those who are dedicated and persistent in helping students with special needs.

Both of these stories are great examples of what Becoming Your Best is all about—learning to be and do your best in all of life's situations.

Submit your inspirational stories to: stories@becomingyourbest.com.

Subscribe to our FREE newsletter: newsletter@becomingyourbest.com.

[WE ARE NOW ON FACEBOOK—BECOME A FAN.](#)

Eagle photo by Bob Sumners. See more at www.shootthebeach.com

Mission:

We are dedicated to presenting inspiring stories of hope and encouragement about individuals with disabilities.

These stories of success are meant to provide support and the keys to "Becoming Your Best!"

Thank you for your stories and your support!

George M. Graham Jr.

**"UNIT GIVES STUDENTS AN EARFUL" BY JACKIE DRAKE—THE DAILY REFLECTOR
(MONDAY, OCTOBER 10, 2011)**



Megan Pender, Hearing Impaired Itinerant for Pitt County Schools, guides her students through a life size model of the human ear at Creekside Elementary in Winterville, N.C. (Photo—Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector)

The bones of the inner ear are among the smallest in the human body, but they became larger than life for little humans at one Pitt County school this past week. Both deaf and hearing students at Creekside Elementary on Monday got to work their way through a model of the human ear set up like an obstacle course to coincide with a scientific unit on sound.

The Greenville City Council at its next meeting will proclaim this coming week Deaf Awareness Week, but Creekside is way ahead with their model ear activity.

"I had a really, really, really good time; I learned how sound travels through the ear," hard of hearing second grader Jordan Hagen said.

Such innovation and integration are the norm at Creekside. The school is home to the district's program for the deaf and hard of hearing, which serves more than 40 children — 14 at Creekside.

The program might have to serve more students should one of the state's three specialized schools for the deaf and/or blind be closed due to budget concerns. There are nine Pitt County children at Wilson's Eastern N.C. School for the Deaf, which could send students to the other campuses in Morganton and Raleigh — or maybe back to Pitt — if the state singles it out for closure.

The state Department of Public Instruction has been directed by the General Assembly to make recommendations to close one of the schools, consolidating services at the remaining two schools. Following a series of public hearings last month, the department will make its recommendations by mid January.

Pitt County serves children with a full range of hearing needs from partial loss to fully deaf sign-language users, according to Exceptional Children's Director Cathy Keeter. But the state deaf schools provide specifically trained staff for students with intense hearing needs that are often accompanied by other physical or developmental issues.

"If the (Wilson) school closes, certainly they are our children and we would welcome them, but they were at that school for a reason and we would really have to work to get them assimilated," Keeter said. Integration of hearing and non-hearing students is beneficial for both groups, but some students need a more specialized environment, she added. Pitt County works with families to help decide which school would be best for their children.

The district has been serving deaf and hard of hearing children in Pitt County for years, according to Keeter, but a concerted effort in the past few years brought them to be served at Creekside instead of staff running from school to school.

"Creekside has become the hub at the elementary level," Keeter said.



Jordan Hagen talks about what she learned by using the 3D model of the human ear. (Photo—Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector)

"UNIT GIVES STUDENTS AN EARFUL" - CONTINUED

Classrooms at Creekside are outfitted with special microphones, audio systems and visual display devices. The staff includes language facilitators, speech therapists and sign language interpreters.

Concentrating the hard of hearing students not only benefits staff and budgets, it more importantly benefits the children, officials said. "Bringing them to a central location helps them understand that they are not alone and they don't feel as isolated," Keeter said.

Creekside was chosen based on a number of factors: location, clustering of children, available space and a supportive principal. Having the deaf program based at her school is "awesome for me," said Creekside Principal Carla Frinsko, a former special education teacher.

Integrating deaf and hard of hearing students with general education students is a key piece of the program. "They're going to live in a hearing world and this program allows them to develop their skills," Keeter said.

The program benefits hearing students as well. "It has helped our regular education students become more empathetic and understand that we all have challenges," Frinsko said.

The model ear activity provided an opportunity not only for all students to learn about the ear, but also for deaf and hearing students to learn about each other. Since most of the ear's workings are internal, deaf and hard of hearing teacher Megan Pender was looking for a visual way to show students how the ear converts vibrations into sounds.

Students pretended they were the vibrations that enter the ear and traveled through a tunnel representing the ear canal, a plastic curtain representing the ear drum, a box frame holding the inner ear bones, and another tunnel representing the cochlea, which transfers vibrations to the auditory nerve to the brain. "It was really eye opening for all the kids," Pender said.

"My favorite part was the ear drum because I made it vibrate," hard of hearing second grader Ayshia Tyson said. "She was so excited," Ayshia's mother Cynthia Tyson said. "She would share what she learned about the ear with the rest of the family. She is actually teaching us."

Hearing students learned that hearing loss isn't just in the elderly population. "At this age they don't understand that young people can be deaf too," Pender said.

The activity also helped hard of hearing students understand which parts of their ears are the source of their hearing loss so they can deal with other children's curiosity.

"I want deaf and hard of hearing children to be able to advocate for themselves," Pender said.



Megan Pender talks about the 3D model (Photo—Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector.)

This article was used with permission from The Daily Reflector (Al Clark), Jackie Drake, and Rhett Butler. We would like to thank them for permission to use this article and the photos. The Daily Reflector is located in Greenville, N.C. (Pitt County) and provides local news, sports and information to eastern North Carolina.

We would also like to say a special thank you to Megan Pender and staff at Creekside Elementary School in Winterville, N.C. for the wonderful work they are doing with their students. Thank you to Cathy Keeter for her leadership in helping to provide services for students with disabilities.

"LOCAL WOMAN COMPETES IN EQUESTRIAN EVENTS AT N.C. SPECIAL OLYMPICS BY SHARON SULLIVAN AND SAMANTHA IULO

With the expertise of First Flight High School (FFHS) teacher Samantha Iulo, FFHS alum Krystal Johnston trained to successfully compete in the October 1 and 2 Special Olympics Equestrian Competition in Raleigh, N.C. Krystal has been riding 21 Sundancer (Sunny) since Spring 2011 under Iulo, who is a certified Equestrian Special Olympics coach/PATH Certified Instructor.

"Krystal has been riding with MANE & TAILL Therapeutic Horsemanship Academy since the program opened in 2009," reports Iulo. "During the time Krystal has been at MANE & TAILL, her mom, Ann Johnston, has seen the positive impact that horseback riding has provided to Krystal." In fact, Ann Johnston is one of the founding board members of MANE & TAILL, serving as an essential volunteer during Krystal's training and at the show.

"Sunny's owner, Abigail Rippin, and her mom, Trish Rippin, volunteered the use of their wonderful horse, as well as helped Krystal prepare for the show - even volunteering at the show themselves in support of Krystal's efforts. Abigail competed with Krystal in the Unified Partner Relay race where they had fun, gained confidence, and received the bronze medal!"



Krystal Johnston—Special Olympics Equestrian athlete.



Krystal, Sundancer (Sunny) and Abigail Rippin (Sunny's owner.) Krystal and Abigail competed in the Unified Partner Relay where they received the bronze medal.

Special Olympics Unified Events are opportunities for athletes with special needs to compete with their non-disabled peers. "Krystal also competed in individual competition with six other Special Olympic Equestrian Athletes in categories including Western Showmanship, Western Trail, and Western Equitation, and by all account did a did fabulous job - receiving two fourth and one sixth places." No wonder that Krystal is already thinking about next year's competition!" Ann Johnston reflects that it was a remarkable event and one of the most memorable experiences of her life.

Iulo extends appreciation to NC Special Olympics for providing housing and meals to the athletes, volunteers, and coaches during the event, local Special Olympics Coordinator Renate Macchirole, Dare County Schools Exceptional Children's Director George Graham, Dare County Parks and Recreation's Spencer Gregory, the OBX Autism Society, the Wright Place, and Trish Rippin - for their enthusiastic support.

"I am hoping to coach Krystal, and up to four other riders, to compete in the 2012 show. I have to say that we are always in need of funds and donations including tack and horse equipment, donations of time from volunteers, and even horses," reports Iulo. They are currently looking for a horse that can compete with Sunny next year. This was Dare County's first time to compete in NC Special Olympics Equestrian events. Abigail Rippin (Krystal's Unified Partner) is 11 years old and attends Moyock Middle School. Krystal is 23 years old and works part time at Food Lion and at the Wright Place in Kitty Hawk, NC.

Krystal Johnston—the thrill of victory—building self-confidence (picture to the right.)



"LOCAL WOMAN COMPETES..." - CONTINUED

MANE & TAILL Therapeutic Horsemanship Academy is a non-profit, volunteer based program that provides area children and adults with special needs an opportunity to learn horsemanship and horseback riding in a safe, nurturing environment.

For more information go to <http://maneandtaill.org/>

We would like to thank Sharon Sullivan and Samantha Iulo for sharing this wonderful story about Krystal and for giving us permission to use the story in this issue of the Becoming Your Best Newsletter.

A special thank you to Trish Rippin and Abigail Rippin for the use of their horse and for volunteering to help Krystal.

First Flight High School (FFHS) is located in Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina.

"The most attractive people in the world are the ones who are interested in others—turned outward in cheerfulness, kindness, appreciation, instead of turned inward to be constantly centered in themselves." - Pat Boone.

I had the privilege of presenting at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Exceptional Children Division's 61st Conference on Exceptional Children, on October 31, 2011 in Greensboro, N.C.

I was thrilled and honored to be able to share about the Becoming Your Best project with those in attendance at the session. I was especially humbled by the response. Here are a few comments from the attendees:

"Absolutely loved the concept of this session! The videos and entire presentation was incredibly inspiring. Thank you for making a difference in my day."

"It is nice to have something to help us frame the positive in this time of negativity."



Presenter—George M. Graham Jr. at the 61st Conference on Exceptional Children—October 31, 2011, Greensboro, N.C. (Photo—Bob Sumners)

"Great concept. We all need to encourage and be encouraged. Thank you!"

"Very uplifting and positive...thank you!"

"This was a very good session. It made me think about how I teach and treat the people around me. It makes me want to do better and push harder."

"Very uplifting! Loved the stories!"

"Very moving—really enjoyed the presentation."

"Great way to start the day."

"I am very inspired!"

"Great start to the conference! So glad I came!"

"Thank you for a great presentation."

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