Holding Court: Student Achieves Success in Basketball and Beyond

He shoots! He scores! You can hear a three-point shot swish through the basketball hoop. It’s an exciting moment for any athlete, but for Devin Pope, a student with autism, it’s a moment that makes him, his parents, and the crowd go crazy.

Devin is in seventh grade at Bayless Junior High School in the Bayless School District and receives services from Special School District. He previously attended SSD’s Southview School, but his progress made it possible for him to transition back to his home school.

“Devin has done a great job. He was really progressing well at Southview and wasn’t having any issues,” said his mom, Jamie Pope. “We wanted to challenge him. We figured it would either work or it wouldn’t, and we would never know until we put him to the test.”

Pope said Devin was ready to go back to Bayless and always liked the school. She said, “He’s been doing great since he transitioned back.”

“I’m happy here. I like the activities. I like my teachers,” said Devin. “I like the school and buzzer beaters,” referring to making a basket when the buzzer goes off during a game.

After developing a relationship with his advisory teacher and basketball coach at Bayless, Steven Spolijaric, Devin tried out for and made the basketball team.

“The coach’s positive and inclusive approach has carried over to the team,” said SSD area coordinator Jenny Grigsby. “The team welcomed Devin with open and loving arms and they value his skills as a player. The team even developed a signature play on the court to get Devin into his favorite shooting spot.”

Spolijaric said the school is very inclusive. “This is my fourth year at Bayless. Everyone is included. We think of it as a family,” he said. “Everyone is fantastic about including everyone.”

According to Spolijaric, the players came up with a shot they call “The Banger,” which allows Devin to get into position for a three-point shot. “He likes to get into the corner and we reverse the ball and kick it back the other way,” Spolijaric said. “Defense is shifted. This allows Devin to get open. He’s close every time and it goes in more than you would think. It’s really kind of fun, and actually the crowd erupts when he makes it, and it’s pretty cool.”

Grigsby said Devin’s success wouldn’t be possible without the support of his parents. “They go to his games and practices and make sure Devin is well-prepared for whatever comes next,” she said.

Pope said Devin has always been involved in a lot of activities. “We would go to Devin’s older sister’s basketball games and we could just tell that Devin was missing something. He wanted to be cheered for like she was.”

Devin’s parents investigated Special Olympics and discovered it was a good match for Devin. He joined the Falcons Special Olympics team. “He loves it when he makes a basket,” said Pope. “He looks up in the stands to see a thumbs up, and he’s good for the game.”

While Devin’s family has enjoyed both the Special Olympics basketball program and basketball at Bayless, Devin’s dad said he got a little emotional at the last game of the season at Bayless.

“As a dad, when you first have your son, you can envision all those things like playing in baseball games, and being a basketball star and what not,” said Stephen Pope. “But now you’re seeing him do those things and actually starting a game. I’m tickled to death.”
On April 12, 2018, SSD recognized the outstanding achievements of local students at the annual Commitment to Kids banquet. This year, 21 students received the Rosemary Zander Award. Others were honored with financial scholarships for college and summer camps.

The Rosemary Zander Award has long recognized the accomplishments of students receiving services from SSD. Since 1988, students have been honored for success in a variety of categories — academics, arts, athletics, communications, vocational training, employment, independent living skills, community service and extracurricular activities.

Each of the 2018 award recipients has diverse achievements and has had varied challenges to meet and overcome. And they all have demonstrated the central mission of SSD — all students can learn, succeed and contribute to our community.

Read about several of this year’s Rosemary Zander Award recipients below. To learn more about each award winner’s inspiring story, visit http://bit.ly/c2k2018 to read their individual profiles and watch a video featuring the honorees.

### Bryson May
Bryson May’s family knew he would face some serious challenges in his life.

Bryson was born at just 26 weeks. He didn’t take his first independent steps until he was 5 years old. Now in the fourth grade at Brown Elementary in the Hazelwood School District, Bryson has cerebral palsy and wears cochlear devices.

Yet, Bryson approaches each challenge with an infectious smile and energy that can’t be matched.

“He has a can-do attitude,” said Amanda Howell, an SSD teacher at Brown Elementary. “All of the staff and teachers love him, and he’s always encouraging his peers,” she said.

Bryson has already made a huge impact at Brown Elementary. He’s a recipient of the Best of Brown character award, has been selected for special projects like the school’s STEM garden and has thrown out a first pitch at a Cardinals game.

Over the course of the last year Bryson has made nearly two years of growth in reading comprehension. He’s dedicated to developing his motor skills, as well, participating in the Tri My Best Triathlon, Camp Independence and St. Louis Challenger Baseball.

### Ramona Kennedy
Ramona Kennedy is a tremendous ambassador at SSD’s Southview School. As a leader who has made great strides academically and personally, there are few people who enter the school and leave not knowing her. As Ramona prepares to graduate, she has made great progress in her transition program, and has developed confidence and increased her level of responsibility and ability to respond to her surroundings. She has made great strides in her ability to communicate for herself — expressing her needs and emotions appropriately.

Ramona’s résumé is impressive. She has gained work experience as a volunteer at Sunset Hills Community Center, China 1, Easter Seals, Ronnie’s Theatre, and St. Louis ARC. Ramona lives up to her mission statement: “I will work hard at learning my job skills at school and at work. I will do my best jobs, follow directions and show up to school on time!”

Along with this, Ramona shows great empathy and compassion toward her friends and fellow students. She independently helps her classmates, and encourages them when they need it. Further, she is eager to receive and offer positive feedback. Her friendly demeanor and charm brings a smile to everyone who meets her.

### Ameer Alzahabi
Ameer Alzahabi is a standout student, who has shown great progress in gaining skills at SSD’s South Technical High School and Parkway West High School. But along with giving his best inside the classroom to maintain his high GPA, he gives even more outside of the classroom in his community.

Ameer was born in the United States, but frequently travels to Syria where some of his close relatives reside. The conditions he has encountered there have impacted him deeply. As a result, he has volunteered much of his time to improving the situation for orphans from Syria. He has also helped refugees by traveling to refugee camps and working with the children there. At home, Ameer has made a difference by assisting with resource drives to help send medicine, furniture, blankets and other supplies to those who need them overseas.

In his Design and Entrepreneur class, Ameer has worked on a project to reach out to those who are adversely affected by war. Further, he has spoken publicly to groups about the effects of war on those he knows — particularly the effects war has had on children.
2018 ROSEMARY ZANDER AWARD RECIPIENTS

AMEER ALZAHABI
Parkway West High School/South Technical High School, Parkway Schools/SSD

Catie Barnes
Steger Sixth Grade Center, Webster Groves School District

Selena Bell
Marquette High School/South Technical High School, Rockwood School District/SSD

Alexis Cheney
Mehlville High School/South Technical High School, Mehlville School District/SSD

Collin Fiore
Hazelwood West High School, Hazelwood School District

Lilly Kilgore
Bellerive Elementary, Parkway Schools

Ryan Friend
Hazelwood West High School, Hazelwood School District

Keliah Killmade
Webster Groves High School/South Technical High School, Webster Groves School District/SSD

Alli Glosemeyer
Valley Park High School, Valley Park School District

Maggie Kimberlin
Lindbergh High School, Lindbergh Schools

Brett Hebert
Lindbergh High School, Lindbergh Schools

Caitlyn Kuntz
Barrets Elementary, Parkway Schools

Ramona Kennedy
Southview School, SSD

Blyson May
Brown Elementary, Hazelwood School District

Donovan Obando
Brentwood High School, Brentwood School District

Mic'Keal Phillips
Neuwoehner High School, SSD

Johnathon Schuppe
Individualized Learning Center, Rockwood School District

Adam Weigel
Mehlville High School/South Technical High School, Mehlville School District/SSD

2018 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Sammy Goldman “Living Big” Campership
Alan Sanchez
Brentwood Middle School, Brentwood School District

Allison M. Haake Memorial Scholarship
Zerina Cizmic
Affton High School/South Technical High School, Affton School District/SSD

Bonhomme Lions Scholarships
Emily Bayer
Oakville High School/South Technical High School, Mehlville School District/SSD

Zerina Cizmic
Affton High School/South Technical High School, Affton School District/SSD

Madelyn Hubbs
Pattonville High School, Pattonville School District

Jacob Middleworth
South Technical High School, SSD

SSD James E. Westbury Memorial Board of Education Scholarships
(Jenned by Thomeczek & Brink LLC)
Jasmine Buchanan
University City High School, The School District of University City

Cierra Williams
North Technical High School, SSD

Foundation Debuts New Program
Working in collaboration with SSD, the Special Education Foundation has introduced a program to meet critical needs of students with disabilities so that they may be able to fully engage in the learning process. Critical needs include:

- Basic needs, such as clothing and hygiene items
- Nutritious foods
- Incontinence supplies
- Prescriptions
- Eyeglass repair
- Dental services

Visit www.sef-stl.org/programs/critical-needs for more information, to apply for aid or to donate to this program.

Golf for a Cause
The 16th Annual Dan McLaughlin Golf Tournament to Benefit Special Education Foundation is scheduled for Monday, Oct. 8, at Norwood Hills Country Club. It is the organization's biggest fundraiser of the year, raising more than $300,000 in 2017, and is key to the delivery of the organization's programs for students with disabilities. SEF is proud to work with many SSD volunteers to make this event a success. Raffle ticket sales alone among staff and SSD schools raised $10,000, with Litzsinger School selling the most tickets.

For information about the SEF’s programs or to help with the golf tournament, visit www.sef-stl.org or contact karen@sef-stl.org.

Congratulations!
The Foundation has a lot to celebrate. Its 2017-2018 Fred Saigh Leadership class graduated on May 2. It also awarded five John Cary Scholarships totaling $25,000 on April 25 to students who receive services from SSD:

- Selena Bell, South Technical High School, who plans to attend University of Arizona
- Adam Bristoe, Lindbergh High School, who plans to attend Maryville University
- Madelyn Hubbs, Pattonville High School, who plans to attend Maryville University
- Ethan Morris, South Technical High School, who plans to attend Maryville University
- Dieynaba Sam, North Technical High School and Normandy High School, who plans to attend University of Missouri-St. Louis

Visit www.sef-stl.org/programs/critical-needs for more information, to apply for aid or to donate to this program.
SSD Parent Advisory Council

The SSD Parent Advisory Council (PAC) is comprised of families advising and collaborating to improve the education, confidence and social outcomes of each student served by SSD.

The PAC consists of five parents or guardians — one member and four alternates — from each of the 22 St. Louis County school districts and from each of the five SSD special education schools. The parents or guardians of students receiving special education services in that district or school elect SSD PAC members.

For more information, visit the PAC’s website at https://tinyurl.com/SSDPAC, email pac@ssdmo.org or call 314.989.8448 ext. 6650.