

Youth and Recreation Awards presented at Town Board meeting

By **Jim Herr** - June 14, 2018

CHEEKTOWAGA – The Town of Cheektowaga Department of Youth & Recreational Services presented their annual awards at the town council's regular board meeting on Tuesday.

There was one recipient in the Service to Youth category and two Outstanding Cheektowaga Youth recipients. The awards are made possible by the Cheektowaga Youth Foundation and a special thanks to the Detective Potienko Memorial Foundation.

Service to Youth Awards | *Blue Bridges Initiative -Organization*

Blue Bridges program is an Initiative that focuses on encouraging positive interactions between Cheektowaga Police Officers and Cheektowaga Youth. The program mainly targets youth at the middle school level since this is when they begin to form the impression of authority figures that may stay with them for life. The officers who participate in these events are all doing so voluntarily and on their own personal time.



Cheektowaga Police Sgt. Justin Haag, Sgt. Caleb Harte, and Jacob Becker of Marketing Mayor receives the town's Service to Youth Award on June 12th. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

This initiative has a three-prong approach; the first prong is called Blue Battles. The main focus of this prong is events that take place in the school that incorporate the Police Officers, students, and teachers. These events can be athletic in nature (ex. teacher/student VS. Police handball/obstacle course) or non-athletic in nature (ex. escape rooms) to make sure the interactions appeal to all students and officers skills.

Blue Mittens is the second prong of the initiative. This component of the program focuses on underprivileged youth and/or youth who have recently experienced a trauma. The police officers take these children to lunch and on a shopping spree to Target, where they can pick out presents for themselves or anyone else in their lives. This event gives the children something positive to focus on and sometime think about themselves instead of the challenges in their lives.



The final section of the initiative is the Blue Beginnings piece. This focuses on outreach for an at-risk youth in the community. The Police Department partners with school officials, community organizations and parents to reach out to the youth engaging in risky behavior and falling into bad patterns. The team tries to work with the youth to address any issues or barriers they might have inhibiting them from getting back on the right track.

To date the Blue Bridges program has been involved in seven different activities in three of our school districts with one more event planned for this month. The thirty- five different officers have logged over 200 volunteer hours.

2017 OUTSTANDING CHEEKTOWAGA YOUTH AWARDS

Mohammed Al-Kawaz has been nominated as a recipient of the 2017 Outstanding Cheektowaga Youth Award. Mohammed is a senior at Cheektowaga Central High School; he arrived as a refugee with his family from Baghdad, Iraq in September of 2016.

Mohammed Al-Kawaz receives an Outstanding Youth Award on June 12th. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

He has had to adapt to so many changes in such a short period of time and it took him a good part of the year to adjust to all the changes.

Mohammed never complained and just kept pushing forward, working to the best of his ability enabling him to be successful in the classroom. Mr. Al-Kawaz has always taken his academics seriously and taken advantage of every resource available to him. He has an amazing work ethic that allowed him to obtain an 88 average his first year despite his language deficit. This year his grades are truly amazing, with an overall GPA the first marking period of 94.5, which allowed him to be inducted to the National Honor Society.

Always wanting to be busy and productive drove Mohammed to join the swim team last year. He did not know how to swim, but the coach was very understanding and included him in all the practices, and his skills improved immensely. Last summer Mohammed got a job with Service Master, a cleaning company, where he still works today.

Last year at the underclassmen awards ceremony Mr. Al-Kawaz was awarded the "Triple C Award", which is presented by the New York State Attorney General to a deserving student that demonstrates: good character, commitment and courage in the face of adversity. This year he has won the Buffalo Urban

League Scholarship, Outstanding Attendance Award and Character Education Award. Mohammed wants to go to college for his nursing degree so he can help others; he is a valuable asset to the community and truly an Outstanding Cheektowaga Youth which makes him extremely deserving of this award.

In addition to a plaque, Mohammed will be receiving a \$150.00 award sponsored by the Detective Potienko Memorial Foundation.

Jack Kreuzer is also this year's recipient of the Outstanding Cheektowaga Youth Award. Jack is currently a senior at Cheektowaga Central High School and he is highly involved in his school and community.

Jack Kreuzer receives an Outstanding Youth Award on June 12th. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

Jack has had an interest in announcing sporting events since the sixth grade. At that time he noticed no one was announcing the modified basketball games at home so Jack asked if he could give it a try. He was a natural so when the girls varsity basketball coach noticed his ability he asked him if he would do the play by play announcing for the girls' games. From there things blossomed and Jack began doing play by play announcing for JV and Varsity Football, Varsity girls and boys and Unified Basketball games and most other major sporting events.

People outside of the school recognize his talent; he is announcing for Division 1 athletic teams as well as professional teams. Jack sounds as professional as a grown man; he was announcing a boys' basketball game two years ago and a Channel 4 News sports announcer was at the game and could not believe his eyes when he saw young Jack Kreuzer. As a result, the sports announcer did a lengthy story on Jack. Mr. Kreuzer also announces the school news and morning announcements at Cheektowaga Central High School.

Jack's amazing voice is not just used for announcing sports; he is highly involved in the school music and theater programs. He has an amazing voice and has most of the lead roles in school plays. He also does theater outside of school and will start practices soon for a professional theater group in one of their leading roles.

Despite having all this on his plate Jack has managed to maintain a good GPA in school as well. Mr. Kreuzer is planning on attending Syracuse University in the fall and has already been in contact with them to express his interest in announcing their sporting events. It is Jack's nature to be involved and donate his time and talents to his community. Jack Kreuzer is truly an exceptional example of youth in the Town of Cheektowaga and very deserving of this award.

In addition to a plaque, Jack will be receiving a \$150.00 award sponsored by the Detective Potienko Memorial Foundation.