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MARYLAND

GOOD WORKS Youths' community work wins scholarships

Kohl's awards \$1,000 each for outstanding service

By Peter Krause
THE BALTIMORE SUN

Abby Cahalan raised awareness about concussion, Alexander Griffith designed and built a playground. And Raquel Funes collected thousands of shoes. For these three Baltimore-area youths, being good citizens has paid off in more ways than one.

The students are among 20 youths recognized nationwide this summer by Kohl's department store for their outstanding community service. Each has received a \$1,000 Kohl's Kids Who Care Regional Scholarship for Positive Community Involvement. Scholarship recipients range in age from 4 to 18 and are chosen based on initiative, creativity, leadership and generosity.



Abby Cahalan, 14, suffered a concussion when she was hit in the head while playing for the Baltimore Bay in 2008.

Abby, 14, knows about head injuries first-hand. After suffering a severe concussion while playing soccer in 2008, the Reisterstown teen made it her mission to raise awareness among lawmakers and the public about the danger of head injuries in youth sports.

"When she started experiencing the symptoms of a head injury we were taken by surprise," says Abby's mother, Joyce K.

hahn. "What makes a head injury so complicated is that you cannot see it."

The Delaney High freshman, who had suffered two previous concussions, now has chronic headaches. But she hasn't let that stop her in the way of creating support for the Maryland Concussion Bill, which would provide guidelines to coaches and parents about how to better prevent, identify and treat head injuries.

The scholarship from Kohl's has affirmed Abby's faith in her efforts to raise awareness about head injuries in youth sports, her mother says.

"She hopes that more that this terrible thing has happened to her, perhaps she can help and leave it from happening to others."

Like Abby Alexander Griffith was moved by his own experience when he decided to create a playground in Russia. Having spent most of his first year of life in Children's Hospital No. 26 in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, Alexander wanted to have an impact on his birthplace.

A few years ago, when he was 12, Alexander decided to use his Eagle Scout community service project to design and build a playground at the hospital.

The designed the new playground from scratch," says his father, Dwight Griffith, who along with his wife, Jerry, adopted Alexander in 1994. "There were a thousand issues in the whole process, but we managed to work through them all."

Alexander was able to help the playground parts manufacturer at a discount. After realizing that most playgrounds in Russia included some sort of wooden folk art, he proposed a folk-art inspired folk art from Canada to be made into a pair of steeple poles. Two wood carvers from Tennessee and New York were recruited to fashion the wood into two symbols: a bear and an eagle, rep-

resenting the friendly relationship between the United States and Russia.

"International shipping of the log was definitely the biggest issue," his father said.

The playground pieces were shipped to Maryland, pre-assembled so volunteers would be familiar with how to put them together, and then sent to Siberia.

Alexander, who now attends North Harford High School, raised \$92,656 to pay for the project, which took more than two years to complete.

The playground was dedicated last year on Alexander's 16th birthday. A CNN news team, citing Russian television stations, a children's choir and the deputy mayor of Krasnoyarsk were present.

It was coverage of another international event that inspired Raquel Funes' idea.

The 12-year-old, who lives in Reisterstown, saw the devastation caused by the earthquake in Haiti in January and knew she had to help.

Raquel led a weeklong shoe-drive at Sacred Heart School in Clydesdale, where she is a student, and collected 2,400 pairs of shoes to be donated to earthquake victims through the Tennessee charity Soles4Souls. She also helped organize an "out-of-school-day" at her school where students could donate \$5 in exchange for wearing Haitian colored clothing in place of their school uniforms. The effort raised \$2,000.

WATCHDOG Updates on two stubborn problems

This week, Watchdog shares some updates on some knotty problems.

Update: The construction of a culvert at North Charles Street has been completed, and a sturdy metal railing has been installed, according to the Baltimore public works department.

Longtime Watchdog readers may recall a concern about a flimsy fence on North Charles Street north of Cold Spring Lane.

The sidewalk strip plenty of traffic from students attending Towson University of Maryland and visitors to the Evergreen Museum and Library, which is owned by the Johns Hopkins University.

But on the east side of Charles Street, only a flimsy fence kept people from tambling down a steep embankment.

The fence had been there for years while public works officials worked to extend a culvert that carried the Storey Run, a Jones Falls tributary under Charles Street. It was too short, and so the flowing water started to erode the hillside, hoses from field drains, along with normal freezing patterns, also loosened soils in the support wall.

Basically you were losing the sidewalk there, and potentially the roadbed," said

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DPW spokesman Kurt Koehler. After Watchdog called attention to the matter, Public Works crews secured the lower portion of the fence.

Now the culvert has been extended and a metal fence has been erected, Koehler said.

The \$1.1 million project took about a year. "Everything is done, except for replanting trees on the slope," Koehler said. "That isn't some until October sometime because of the planting season."

That should help the soil stay put.

Update: The holes on a residential street in Northeast Baltimore have been filled.

The Hills Commission Watchdog after encouraging their other options. After street



A culvert under North Charles Street north of Cold Spring Lane near Johns Hopkins University has been completed and the sidewalk secured.

light repair contractors left ugly blacktop patches on sidewalks of the 700 block of Mars Ave. that eventually washed away. They reported the problem to Baltimore Gas & Electric Co., but got nowhere.

Watching contain a BGE spokesman, who discovered that city transportation officials never got the message that a permanent repair was needed.

The utility sent workers to refill most of the holes temporarily but they missed one—the deepest one.

But after the article was published, city workers showed up to make the permanent fix. Linda Holt was home, and alerted them of the repair problem.

The hole was filled, she reported.

"The hole is now gone," she said. "It's safe for anyone to walk on."

—Liz P. Day

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