

All Eyes On: Jared Niemeyer

Special Olympics athlete leaves lasting effect, meets celebrities

BY AMANDA HERZBERG
Staff Reporter

A box filled with hundreds of pledge cards sits on a shelf in Special Olympics Coach Jamie Janes' office at Kirksville High School. Small, white pieces of paper signed by students from the Kirksville school district read, "I pledge and support the elimination of the derogatory use of the r-word from everyday speech and promote the acceptance and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities."

The pledge cards represent a small contribution to a nationwide campaign sponsored by the Special Olympics known as "Spread the Word to End the Word."

Jared Niemeyer, Kirksville High School senior and Special Olympics athlete, is at the forefront of Kirksville's involvement in the campaign.

The program is designed to raise awareness about the hurtful and offensive qualities of the use of the word "retard" or "retarded" conversationally.

The campaign has targeted the public school system. With Jared's contribution to the cause, and the help of Kirksville High School sophomore Elizabeth Janes, the campaign's involvement has been successful in raising awareness, especially among high school students.

Both Jared and Elizabeth are involved with the Special Olympics. They are members of the Missouri Youth Activation Committee and support Project Unify, which is sponsored by the Special Olympics and promotes community unification. Jared said he has become involved with YAC on a national level as one of 20 athletes and partners from across the nation.

In becoming involved at this level, Jared said he has had countless mem-



Jared Niemeyer poses for a picture with Vice President Joe Biden and his wife Jill, at the Bidens' home in Washington, D.C. Niemeyer has met a handful of celebrities throughout his travels as a member of the Missouri Youth Activation Committee.

Submitted by Brenda Niemeyer

"Jared's enthusiasm is typically what kind of draws people in. He's very excited about things."

Brenda Niemeyer
Niemeyer's mother

orable experiences including various trips to serve as a YAC representative as well as meeting singers Joe Jonas and David Archuleta and Vice President Joe Biden at his home in Washington, D.C.

"Jared's enthusiasm is typically what kind of draws people in," said Kirksville High School counselor and Jared's mother

Brenda Niemeyer. "He's very excited about things."

On a more personal level, Jared said his Kirksville team has provided the most unforgettable part of his Special Olympics experience and the essential foundation for what he has accomplished thus far. He speaks highly of his coach and fellow team members. The bond is particularly evident in the friendship that has developed between Jared and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth has volunteered with the Special Olympics since she was a child. While still not yet old enough to be a coach herself, she continues to attend practices and help in any way she can.

Upon entering high school, Elizabeth vowed to see to it that

students with developmental disabilities were treated as equals by their peers. This goal contributed to Elizabeth's involvement in promoting the "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign.

"Most kids don't understand," Elizabeth said. "They ask why it's offensive because they don't understand the meaning behind it and how the context we're using it in isn't right."

Niemeyer and Elizabeth are more than just activists. They work together on the athletic side of the Special Olympics as well.

Elizabeth said she helps, and at times acts as a partner athlete — athletes without developmental disabilities — participating in

some of the unified sports. She said she considers herself more of a friend to the athletes than anything else.

Jared is a regular competitor on both the regional and national levels, and said his favorite events are the 400-meter dash and shot put.

"I'm real super fast," Jared said.

One of Jared's fondest memories of his Special Olympic involvement, he said, was having the Truman baseball team cheering him on as he competed in the spring track meet competition at the University.

Jared and Elizabeth agree that they will continue their Special Olympics involvement after high school.

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