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Grace Strobel defies the odds

Karla Tipton
Herald Staff Writer

The weight of a doctor's poor prognosis might cause some people to lose hope, but not the Strobel family. When their oldest daughter Grace was born with Down syndrome 22 years ago, her parents Linda and Jeff, who both have roots in Norton and now live in St. Louis, did not give into despair.

"When I was born, doctors said I would never amount to much, or tie my own shoes," said Grace.

Overcoming the odds, Grace has become a public speaker who urges acceptance of those who are different, and educates students and adults alike on how it feels to live with Down syndrome.

Last year, she embarked on a modeling career, having been inspired by Australian model Madeline Stuart, who also has the condition. When Grace released her portfolio on social media, her photos went viral and hit 220,000 shares in two weeks in 15 different countries. Since then, she has been featured in five magazines.

"We had no idea how it would turn out, but

it's bigger than we ever imagined," said Linda, who worked for many years at her father's car dealership, A Merry Oldsmobile in Norton, before moving away and getting married to Jeff Strobel, a graduate of Norton High School and Kent State, and former U.S. Naval officer.

Choosing a different path

According to the predictions, Grace would never learn to read or write and would be a burden on her family for the rest of their lives.

Down syndrome is a genetic disorder caused by the presence of a third copy of chromosome 21. Typically, it is associated with delays in physical growth, intellectual disability, and characteristic facial features, such as slanted eyes.

"They said if we couldn't handle this, there were places we could adopt her out or put her in an institution," said Linda.

Believing nurture is just as important as nature in child development, Linda set out to prove the doctors wrong. "I said, there's no way we are going down that road.



COURTESY PHOTO
Grace Strobel, born with Down syndrome, launched a modeling career last year.

I never really listened to the predictions," she said. "We were blessed. Grace didn't have any huge medical issues."

That's not to say there were not challenges. "She definitely struggles with things. But she is incredibly hard working."

Facing obstacles

The Strobels addressed the obstacles head-on as a family. "We treated Grace

just like our other daughter, Laine. We expected the same behavior, we made her do chores, and we started Grace reading really early. She started reading at age 3 with flashcards. We encouraged her to pursue her talents, and to push herself beyond her comfort zone."

For most of her life, Grace was home-schooled by her mother. When she (See STROBEL, Page 16)

Council accepts finance report Forensic audit flawed

Cierra Thompson
Herald Staff Writer

Council heard the first reading for an ordinance to modify the allowable uses chapter in the development code for special convenience retail uses and special highway commercial uses as related to tattoo and piercing establishments.

The planning commission recommended to eliminate it as a primary use from one group and instead place them under the special convenience retail as primary use which would allow these establishments to operate in commercial districts with a conditional use permit.

Council adopted a resolution to finalize the agreement with the Ohio Department of Transportation regarding the inclusion of state Route

619 in the upcoming Interstate 76 interchange reconstruction project.

At the streets meeting, the Director of Public Service Mike Vinay explained the money to make this happen comes from urban paving funds that cover 80 percent of the cost.

At the March 11 meeting Vinay thanked the crews who've been out tackling the potholes.

As for finance, an ordinance was adopted to enter into contract with the state attorney general's office for the collection of EMS transport collective fees and delinquent income tax money owed to the city.

An ordinance was adopted to appropriate \$135,000 from the unappropriated item of the (See COUNCIL, Page 19)

Judge offers concessions

Cierra Thompson
Herald Staff Writer

Mayor William Judge and city officials made concessions in order to keep the city jail open and the four full-time firefighters employed.

The announcement was made March 6. According to Judge, they are looking to bring back the reserve police officers who were affected by the layoffs. The 11 jail workers are still employed.

An agreement was reached between Copley Township and Norton to keep the jail open, which requires them to pay more for its usage. Judge said he's

going to continue to meet with the unions to keep them updated because he wants to be as transparent as he can.

The budgetary cuts include the transfer of employees who were paid from the general fund to a non-general fund. He said they are no longer funding the emergency and infrastructure improvement reserve funds. He also added there are positions that have been vacant and won't be filled in order to save money. Earlier this year they raised EMS fees which haven't increased in over 10 years. He said this increase should bring in more money.

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Firefighters' fundraiser nets \$8,000

Jim Eritano
Herald Staff Writer

Firefighters in Norton are getting \$8,000 of new personal equipment, without putting a strain on the budget.

The Norton Firemen's Association teamed up with a photography company that helps organizations raise money for projects that may not be in their annual budgets.

Firefighter Brad Witschey, association president, said, "We set a goal of \$10,000, but we came up just a bit short. Still, it was more than enough for us to buy some of the things on our wish list."

The photographers set up equipment at the fire station, and families and

(See FIREMEN, Page 2)



HERALD PHOTO/Jim Eritano
Norton Firemen's Association President Brad Witschey displays some of the protective equipment purchased with money from the Association's fundraiser.

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Destination Imagination heads to states

Barberton Middle School was the place to be on Saturday, March 9 as 300 kids making up 55 teams gathered for the Ohio Destination Imagination Region 15 Tournament. They competed in seven challenges: technical, scientific, fine arts, improvisation, engineering, service learning and rising stars. Barberton had 12 teams in the tournament this year. Out of 10 eligible teams, six Barberton teams are headed to the state competition, with five winning their competitive category.

Our first place teams are: -The Purple Magicians Are Like Totally Tubular... Psych! (Barberton Elementary West; Fine Arts Challenge). Team members are Caleb Gordon, Kyal Blake, Alexis Valencheck, Alexis Johnson, Langston Sprouse and Kinsley Troha. Team managers are Tara Gordon and Christy Sprouse.

- The Purple Crumbs Stuck In Your Mustache (Barberton Middle School; Scientific Challenge). Team members are Cassie Moore, Quinn Moore, Haley Lorenzo, Wyatt Slater and Cade Kelley. Team Managers are Dawn Moore and Andrea Tomer.

- The Nerd Herd (Barberton Middle School; Service Learning Challenge). Team members are Ava Hart, Tyler Smith, Ava Speedy and Hunter Darkhorse.

- The Has Beens That Never Were (Barberton

High School; Service Learning Challenge). Team members are Lulu Kemp, Aidan Taylor, Maddie Mitchell and Carlie Hurd. Team managers are Susan Kemp and Dave Taylor.

- The Tigabunnies (Barberton High School; Scientific Challenge). Team members are Hunter Adair, Logan Colbetzor, Hansen Risley, Deanna Horner, Orion Lewis and Lena Semertsidis. Team Manager is Jim Jensen.

Also qualifying for the State competition with a second place finish is Operation SNAiL (Barberton Middle School and Barberton High School combined team; Service Learning Challenge). Secondary teams placing second are invited to the state tournament. Team members are Aiden Smith, Nour Solimon, Liam Slater and Shelby Mainarick. Team managers are Beth Smith and Chris Mitchell.

In addition to winning their division, some teams and individuals distinguished themselves and represented our community proudly by winning overall tournament awards.

- Fourth-grader Caleb Gordon won the Spirit of DI Award for his attitude and enthusiasm. - Team <insert clever name here> (Barberton Middle School; Fine Arts Challenge) won a Da Vinci Award for outstanding creativity with the electromagnet they



COURTESY PHOTOS

The Purple Magicians Are Like Totally Tubular...Psych! Left to right: Alexis Valencheck, Langston Sprouse, Kinsley Troha, Kyal Blake, Caleb Gordon, and Alexis Johnson.

created. - The Nerd Herd and The Purple Crumbs Stuck In Your Mustache both won a Renaissance award for outstanding design thinking.

Of the teams that did not qualify for globals, three brought home second place finishes:

-76 Burnt Candied Purple Pickles (Barberton Elementary East; Fine Arts Challenge). Team members are Phoenix Gauer, Molly Bittinger, Ethan Fox, Zoey Lorenzo, Jade Robinson (Fifth-grader at BMS) and Graham Slater. Team manager is Megan Slater.

-The Red-Headed Llamas from Italy (Barberton Middle School; Scientific Challenge). Team members are Shae Ison, Alex Ludwig, Joseph Risley and Sophia Ludwig. Team managers are Ashley Owens and Sherri Ison.

-<insert clever name here> (Barberton Middle School; Fine Arts Challenge). Team members are Lucas Tallant, Gabby Risley and Maryah Rhoden. Team managers are Tom Tallant, Lisa Tallant and Denise Risley.

Finishing a respectable fourth place was first-

year team Magical Minds (Barberton Elementary West; Scientific Challenge). Team members are Asia Townsend, Katie Kiss, Trinity Crews, Roslyn Martin, Francesca Wheeler and Rylie Zirkle. Team managers are Tony Rett and Diane Kiss.

Also joining in the fun were our youngest non-competitive teams, The Rising Stars teams.

-Mighty Cheetah Cats Eating Pizza in a Tree (BEE). Team members are Zachary Moore, Keith Nemchev, Donovan, Robinson, Sophie Fox, Aurora Ludwig and Hudson Wright. Team manager is Abby Robinson.

-The Flying Cupcake Cats (BEW). Team members are Silas Sprouse, Layne Schaefer, Tristan Davis, Kennedy Blake, Christopher Anderson, Emilie Hull, Alexa Travis, Hannah Gordon and Carter Harvey. Team manager is Celeste Sprouse.

Congratulations to all team members, team managers, and everyone involved - the state competition is Saturday, March 30, at Beaver Local Schools in East Liverpool, Ohio.



Operation SNAiL consists of left to right: Liam Slater, Aiden Smith, Nour Solimon, and Shelby Mainarick.

Strobel

(Continued from Front Page)

did attend a private school, Linda got the same books the school had and prepared her daughter on each week's lessons. "We never expected anyone to do anything for us," she said.

It was while in school that Grace experienced bullying by other students, who made fun of her because she had difficulty opening milk cartons and fruit cups.

Grace said, "It hurt. I felt like I died inside."

Linda said, "When I realized what was happening, I was mad for a couple of minutes, but then I thought, it really comes from fear, and from not being educated on what it means to have a disability."

Shattering stereotypes This is what sparked Grace's desire to educate others.

In her own words: "That is when I decided I wanted to make a difference. I wanted

to share with students what it is like to have struggles. I wanted to show how you can change someone's life just by being kind and giving respect."

Last year, Grace was accepted into college, but decided not to go because she would have to move far from her family. In the meantime, Grace will continue public speaking, and hopes to get signed with a modeling agency to evolve her career.

"I think the world is opening up to that," said Linda. "Diversity is now rising, and brands are starting to understand that people want to see models more like themselves."

The modeling will also provide Grace with a platform to share her message.

"Our faith has a lot to do with what we do," said Linda. "We all believe we are all here for a reason, and this is Grace's gift and talent. She can help break down barriers and shatter stereotypes and make this a better world."



The Purple Crumbs Stuck in Your Moustache are, left to right: Cassie Moore, Quinn Moore, Cade Kelley, Wyatt Slater, and Haley Lorenzo.



The Tigabunnies are from left to right: Hunter Adair, Lena Semertsidis, Hansen Risley, Deanna Horner, Orion Lewis, and Logan Colbetzor.



The Nerd Herd, left to right: Ava Speedy, Hunter Darkhorse, Tyler Smith, Ava Har.

★ HERALD GIVEAWAY ★

James Mellor
of Hazelwood Ave., Barberton, wins a \$20 drop-off wash-dry-fold service or \$20 drop-off dry cleaning service or \$20 in-store card for self-service from **Laundry Time**
242 Wooster Rd. N., Barberton • 330-745-6732

John Kamany
of Park Dr., Norton, wins a Classic 4-piece Chicken Dinner from **Hopocan Gardens**
4396 W. Hopocan Ave., Barberton • 330-825-9923

Walter Murrey
of 23rd St., Barberton, wins a Medium One-Topping Pizza from **East of Chicago Pizza**
1317 Shannon Ave., Barberton • 330-753-5830

Linda Derosa
of 28th St., Cuyahoga Falls, wins a Lunch for Two (up to \$15) from **Thano's Restaurant**
71 Fifth St. NE, Barberton • 330-861-1300

Carol Potter
of S Hametown Rd., Norton, wins a Varsity's Coney Sauce Footlong Platter from **Enchanted Cafe**
Corner of Norton Ave. and Barber Rd. • 330-753-5837

Richard Drillien
of E. State St., Barberton, wins a Free Lunch Special (\$7.50 or less) from **Al's Corner Restaurant**
155 Second St. NW, Barberton • 330-753-7216

Carol Meredith
of Easton Rd., Norton, wins a Bundle of Firewood from **Barberton Tree Service**
3307 Clark Mill Rd., Norton • 330-848-2344

Betty Zalar
of Saguaro Pl., Barberton, wins a Cheeseburger and fries from **Hodge's Cafe** (dine-in only)
897 Wooster Rd. W., Barberton • 330-825-6073

Kevin Baker
of Dunn St., Barberton, wins a Free Lunch - up to \$7 from **Casa Del Ranchero** (dine-in only)
562 W. Tuscarwas Ave., Barberton • 330-753-8494

Donald Binkley
of Hemphill Rd., Norton, wins a Pint of Ice Cream from **Papa Roni's**
68 West State Street, Barberton • 330-745-9999

Louis Schmidt
of Hartzell Dr., Norton, wins a Lunch for Two (up to \$15) from Redeemable Monday - Friday **Coventry Diner**
Coventry Towne Plaza, Akron • 330-644-7933

There's no need to enter.
Names are selected at random. Winners must claim a redemption certificate within 14 days after their name appears at the Herald office for the giveaway. The Herald reserves the right to change this promotion or rescind this offer at any time for any reason. Must have identification when claiming redemption certificate at: The Herald: 70 Fourth St. N.W., Barberton.