

STAFF REPORT

DATE: February 21, 2017
TO: City Council
FROM: Carrie Dyer, Community Engagement & Cultural Services
SUBJECT: 2017 Golden Heart Awards

In memory of the death of Andrew Mockus, who was tragically killed by his peers in 1992, the City of Davis Recreation and Park Commission expanded its commitment to the youth of the Davis community. Public forums were held to discuss various issues and to brainstorm on how the community could do more to meet the needs of the teens in Davis. One of the outcomes of the forums was to create an annual award recognizing outstanding youth in the community. Nominations for the award were accepted November 2016 through January 19, 2017. The selection committee spent considerable time reviewing the nominations and were greatly impressed by the nominations. The committee consisted of:

- Stephanie Koop, Recreation and Park Commissioner
- Joan Sallee, former Recreation and Park Commissioner and former School Board Member
- Kate Snow, Davis Joint Unified School District Climate Coordinator
- Eli Smith, City of Davis, Recreation Staff

After lengthy consideration, it is recommended that the following recipients be awarded the Golden Heart Award for 2017.

Community Service: Benjamin Hoffner - Brodsky

Benjamin Hoffner-Brodsky has been involved in community outreach efforts to the needy from age 9, volunteering with his mother at community meals and the Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter. Additionally, in conjunction with the Davis Robotics team Benjamin organized community service events and assisted in setting up a workshop series to make STEM education accessible to new and low-income Robotics teams. He led efforts that raised more than \$140,000 in scholarships and grants for the team. He offered assistance for a Women in STEM lecture series to showcase female role models and encourage women to enter engineering fields.

Benjamin has worked through major struggles in his life with astonishing maturity and grace. Two years ago, a member of our community stepped in front of a moving freight train and took his life. At the time, the Hoffners had been providing this gentleman with housing. Benjamin received his suicide note via email while at school. Many spoke at the memorial service, but it was Benjamin's poised, deeply personal, articulately delivered and beautifully crafted speech that put many of us over the edge. Benjamin described his own unique experience and life affected by his friend which resonated with the entire audience.

Community Service: Rayna Velasquez

While other students may be looking for fame and glory, Rayna has her head down, working steadily with a smile on her face. Rayna operates at a different level than most 12th graders. While she could have applied to prestigious 4-year colleges with her stellar GPA, she is choosing to live with her grandmother and attend community college. Her dream is to become a social worker and help kids in need. She feels a strong responsibility to nurture and protect children, especially children in the foster system.

With this in mind, Rayna has always been passionate about creating a strong Da Vinci community. To support her interest in this area, Rayna has participated in 20 hours of restorative practices training. This year, Rayna helped unveil our restorative practices conflict guidelines to Da Vinci students and is an integral part of the Restorative Practice Student Facilitator team, a group of fourteen students who work to model and mediate restorative conversations on campus. Rayna facilitates Friendship Day, a monthly event in which a group of students come together to build community and get to know folks with whom they would not typically interact. Rayna's influence in creating a supportive and warm school community cannot be emphasized enough.

Personal Challenge: Jusely Arredondo

Jusely displays an incredible amount of resilience in the face of significant personal challenges. As a 7th grader she was a brand new English Language Learner who displayed courage and grace; she found a nurturing group of friends, reached out for support from the adults on campus, and worked hard. By the beginning of 8th grade she had made incredible gains in her English language and was starting to shine as a student. Jusely advocated for herself at the beginning of 8th grade when somehow she was overlooked for support classes. Most 8th graders do not come to the counselor to request a schedule change which would eliminate a fun elective class to add what many would consider a more boring support class, but Jusely did--again showing remarkable insight and maturity for someone so young.

Sadly, the joy that she was beginning to experience in her new community and becoming a big sister that summer was shattered by the loss of her baby sister to SIDS in October of her 8th grade year. Always a mature and thoughtful teen, Jusely grew up even more overnight as a result. In just two years she has improved from a Beginner English Language Learner to an Early Advanced, a jump of three levels. Her grades are excellent considering all she has been through, and she has maintained over a 3.6 GPA. Above all, Jusely is a kind, thoughtful and caring student, friend, daughter and sister and a role model to all.