

# City honors teens for courage, service

**Joe Cobb is congratulated Tuesday at City Hall by Holmes Junior High math teacher Pat King, who nominated him for a Golden Heart Award.**

**FRED GLADDIS/  
ENTERPRISE PHOTO**



*By Anne Ternus-Bellamy*

ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

If it takes a village to raise a child, then surely it takes a village to make sense of the seemingly senseless, violent death of one.

That's what the community of Davis attempted to do back in 1992 when 14-year-old Andrew Mockus, then a student at Holmes Junior High School, was beaten, robbed of \$2 and pushed into a moving train by several other youths.

Stunned, the city responded by conducting public forums to try to uncover the issues facing Davis teens and how the city could do

*See TEENS, Back page*

# TEENS: Many are doing good things

From Page A1

more to help them.

Ultimately, the Davis City Council adopted seven recommendations focused on the city's youth, including the creation of the Golden Heart Awards, which for more than two decades have served two purposes: to ensure that some good comes out of the most unthinkable of tragedies and to remind the community that for every teenager who ends up in the news for the wrong reason, there are countless more youths quietly doing good, sometimes great, things here every day.

If Mockus were alive today, he'd be 37 years old. Married maybe. A father perhaps. Maybe someone doing his part to make Davis a better place.

Instead, his legacy lives on with these awards and fittingly, perhaps, it was Davis Mayor Dan Wolk who opened the awards ceremony in the Community Chambers at City Hall on Tuesday evening.

"Andrew Mockus was a classmate of mine," Wolk said.

They played ball together.

"So this award has particular meaning to me."

In fact, he said, "It's one of the highlights of being a council member."

The awards are bestowed in two categories every year: for community service and for overcoming personal challenges.

## Elizabeth Salomon

Two 16-year-olds received the community service awards this year: Elizabeth Salomon and Jack Liu.

Salomon was nominated by her twin sister, Virginia, for her seven years of dedicated service to the Yolo SPCA.

Beginning at the age of 9, Salomon volunteered at adoption events. But she wanted to do more. So she started making fliers, photographing the animals available for adoption, baking dog treats, helping with paperwork, even administering vaccines and micro-chipping.

At just the age of 12, she was taken under the wing of the SPCA office manager and became so knowledgeable and able, she was once called on to run the office for three straight days.

"It takes a special kind of person to spend her teen years volunteering day after day," said Davis Mayor Pro Tem Robb Davis in recognizing Salomon.

"To date, it is estimated that Elizabeth has spent over 2,600 hours dedicating herself to bettering the lives of animals."

Salomon said her reason for doing so is pretty simple: She loves animals and has wanted to be a veterinarian since she was little — a goal the Davis High School junior still has.

The work, she says, has been difficult at times; working with animals who are neglected or unwanted often can be. But overall, she said, "It's been a really great experience."

## Jack Liu

Her classmate at Davis High, Jack Liu, has dedicated countless hours and energy to his cause as well: the Ronald McDonald House charity.

Liu was nominated for a Golden Heart Award by friend Hilda Llorens for tirelessly serving the charity — which provides a home away from home for families of children with serious medical issues — for the past four years.

He volunteers on the RMHC Scholarship Committee and serves on the



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Above, Peter Holderbein, a student at Holmes Junior High School, accepts his Golden Heart Award from Mayor Dan Wolk and City Councilwoman Rochelle Swanson. Below, Davis Mayor Pro Tem Robb Davis congratulates Golden Heart Award recipients Madison and Andrew Benner, students at Da Vinci High School. At left is their mother Wendy.

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## Robb Davis

Davis mayor pro tem

charity's teen council. One year, he donated all of the holiday money he received to Ronald McDonald House.

Liu also established the first Ronald McDonald Charities Club at Davis High School after being inspired by a fellow water polo player who stayed at the Ronald McDonald House while recovering from a diving accident. The club has since grown to 25 members who support the charity with fundraisers, donations and volunteer work parties.

This summer, Liu will serve as a cabin leader of the RMHC summer camp for children with disabilities.

In receiving his award on Tuesday evening, Liu said, "I am really grateful ... and I definitely have to share this with my club."

## Joseph Cobb

Four teens were honored in the personal challenge category, beginning with Holmes Junior High School student Joseph Cobb, who received a rousing ovation as he approached the dais to be recognized Tuesday night.

"I dream of moments like that," quipped Davis as he waited to recognize Cobb.

The 13-year-old was nominated for a Golden Heart Award by Holmes math teacher Pat King.

Cobb, she said, faces many challenges but lives his life with a very positive attitude and lets nothing get in his way. He is thoughtful and quiet, but has a wonderful sense of humor, she said, and while wearing hearing aids "is incredibly patient with his teacher as she learns to use the teacher microphone."

"He shows initiative to come in at lunch several days a week to finish assignments and has perseverance to get the job done," she said in her nomination.

Added Davis on Tuesday evening, "Joe is held in high regard on campus by both adults and peers."



## Andrew and Madison Benner

Brother and sister Andrew and Madison Benner were jointly recognized for overcoming personal challenges. The recognition could hardly be more fitting — just as the Golden Heart Awards themselves seek to bring some good out of a senseless tragedy, so, too, did the Benners attempt to make their community a better place in the wake of their father's suicide several years ago.

Both Da Vinci Charter Academy students, Madison, 17, and Andrew, 15, were nominated by their school counselor, Cara Messmore, for sharing their grief and lessons with the community.

"Madison and Andrew possess an amazing ability and strength to speak about suicide and loss in their own ways in order to support and educate others," Davis said in recognizing the siblings.

"Madison educated her peers about depression and suicide in a project called Perceptions of Prejudice," he said. "The project provided an opportunity for her peers to understand the impact, first-hand, of people who struggle with depression. She gives hope and is someone people trust and with whom they can share their struggle."

Her brother, meanwhile, "has demonstrated incredible empathy with a (teammate) who lost a brother to suicide this fall," Davis said.

"He shared with his friend that he still has bad days and that they will happen to him as well, and that he will be there for him when they do happen."

Together, Davis said, the Benners "are willing to put aside their own privacy and grief in order to open up to the community and help."

Andrew Benner responded, in turn, with gratitude for the community, "for just being so helpful and thoughtful to our family... and helping us

through all the hard times we've had."

## Peter Holderbein

Peter Holderbein was the fourth personal challenge award recipient, nominated for the award by the Rev. Daniel Smith of Lutheran Church of the Incarnation.

Since kindergarten, Holderbein has struggled with behavioral health issues that led to different diagnoses and treatments. He was assisted through childhood by many doctors and therapists and social workers, as well as special education teachers, Sunday School teachers and his pastor.

For a while, he attended the Plumfield Academy in Sebastopol, where the structure and environment helped Holderbein gain control over his life. He returned to Davis and enrolled at Holmes, where he currently serves as student body treasurer.

"He is passionate about the fight to prevent climate change," said City Councilman Brett Lee in recognizing Holderbein. "In September, he took to the streets and represented his congregation at the People's Climate March in New York City. He is convinced that today's youth will be the most impacted by climate change and that their voice needs to be heard."

"He intends to apply his leadership talents in helping to express that voice within the community that has made such a difference in his life," Lee said.

It was a long and challenging road, but Holderbein now serves as a leader and on Tuesday he expressed not just gratitude for the award itself, but for the whole community of Davis for their assistance in helping him reach this point.

"It really does take a village to raise a child," he said.

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