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COMMUNITY

‘It only takes a ripple to make a wave’

SL schools raise over $5K at second annual KATwalk

By LAUREN FORMOSA
Grand Haven Tribune

Students at Spring Lake Intermediate and Middle School recently came together to celebrate inclusion and support one of their classmates at the school’s second annual KATwalk.

As a finale to the school’s inclusion week on Friday, Sep. 18, Spring Lake fifth- through eighth-grade students headed out to the track at Grabinski Field to walk in support of and raise funds for the KAT6 Foundation.

The KAT6 Foundation supports individuals with KAT6A and KAT6B syndromes, two rare genetic disorders that impact the KAT6 gene, and their families internationally. The nonprofit organization also works to advance research aimed at developing treatments for KAT6 syndromes and to raise awareness for the genetic disorders so they can be more easily identified, treated and studied.

The middle and intermediate schools have personal ties to the KAT6 Foundation through one of its sixth-grade students, Benjamin Bator, and his mother Katie, who teaches sixth grade at the intermediate building.

Benjamin received his KAT6 diagnosis at age 3, and the Bators have been involved with the KAT6 Foundation since then to raise awareness about these rare genetic disorders across the Tri-Cities community. Katie has organized several KATwalks to fundraise for the KAT6 Foundation through Team Benjamin, which are hosted around the world throughout the month of September to support the foundation and the families it supports.

Last year, Katie decided to bring the intermediate and middle school community together to support the KAT6

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Students at Spring Lake Intermediate and Middle School’s KATwalk fundraiser for the KAT6 Foundation walk with Benjamin Bator, a sixth-grader at the intermediate school who was diagnosed with the rare genetic disorder when he was 3 years old.
Courtesy photo / Ashely Reynolds

KATWALK

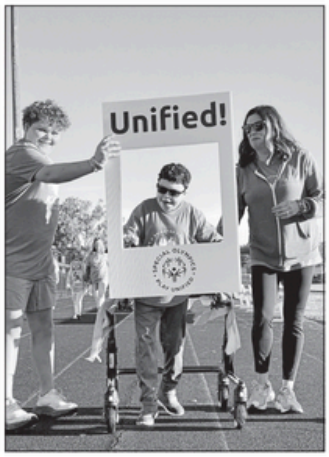
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Foundation by hosting their own KATwalk in partnership with the school’s Unified Sports program. Unified Sports, which is a part of Special Olympics, pairs student athletes with disabilities with a general education partner on the same sports team to play together and build connections.

Fifth- through eighth-grade special education teacher Ashley Reynolds explained that this year’s KATwalk fundraising efforts were organized by the students in the school’s new Peer Connect elective class, which brings together general education students with students with disability in the same classroom



Courtesy photos / Ashley Reynolds
Sixth-grade student Benjamin Bator and his mother Katie, a sixth-grade teacher at Spring Lake Intermediate School, take a photo together on the track during the intermediate and middle school’s second annual KATwalk.



A Spring Lake student holds up a sign for the Spring Lake Intermediate and Middle School Unified Sports program while walking with Benjamin Bator and his mother, Katie, at the schools’ KATwalk.



Sixth-grader Benjamin Bator uses his walker, decorated with orange and teal streamers, to walk several laps around the track during the Spring Lake Intermediate and Middle School KATwalk for the KAT6 Foundation.

Leading up to the schools’ KAwalk, students participated in spirit days and had lessons in their homeroom class about inclusion in celebration of Inclusion Week. The Peer Connect students also held a pop can drive competition between the homeroom classes and sold t-shirts supporting the KAT6 Foundation.

There was a lot of excitement in the air, she said, when the students finally had their second-ever KATwalk for Benjamin.

“It was a blast,” Reynolds said. “They all walked in their teal and orange, which are the colors of KAT6 (Foundation). We had music just blasting from our PE teacher. Ben was there, a lot of his family was there. It was just such a great and full of energy environment.

“Ben, our very own Spring Lake KAT6 warrior, he’s a celebrity in the halls,” she added. “Going around the track, everybody always made sure they stopped and said ‘Hi’ or walked with him. (They) were cheering him on because ... he did two and half full laps around the track with his walker, which was a lot. Coach L, our PE teacher who was announcing and playing all the music, he would call the schools to the middle of the football field to get a big picture, and they’re all fighting to get closest to Ben.”

Through the students’ fundraising efforts, Reynolds estimates that the intermediate and middle school was able to raise just over $5,000 for the KAT6 Foundation.

Reynolds said seeing all the intermediate and middle school students come together to support Benjamin and the KAT6 Foundation felt like a confirmation of all the work begin done to promote inclusivity and acceptance in the school community.

“Inclusion is not just a week-long event ... we’re making it into how we are as Lakers,” Reynolds said. “Obviously, this last week did center more around Ben, but every single day different inclusion lessons were pushed out during homerooms that the teachers taught. So my hope was (for the students to see that) ... everybody faces something different.

“Our theme this year is ‘It only takes a ripple to make a wave,’ so be the ripple. How are you going to start a ripple today?”

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EWING

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“When I got my award, I thanked the person who handed it to me, and she said they wanted me to go up to the podium,” Ewing said. “I had no idea that would happen. I had nothing prepared. But I expressed my thanks and the importance of local history.”

Ewing credited several people with helping him along his journey, including Dr. David Seibold, Betty Kammeraad and Denny Swartout.

“The other one who really influenced me, and he was deceased long before I came back here, is Leo Lilly, who wrote ‘Historic Grand Haven and Ottawa County’ in 1931. That’s still a good book to refer to,” Ewing said.

Speaking of books, Ewing is working on another one titled “Connections,” which explores the connections between Grand Haven and Mackinac Island.

