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Two High School Students to Be Honored for Achievements

Sophomores competed in Special Olympics, international history competition

ELGIN - The School District U-46 Board of Education Monday will recognize two students for their recent achievements, one in an international history competition and the other in the Illinois Special Olympics.

Zuzanna Lapa won the film category in her age group in a historical competition organized by a Polish organization called the Remembrance Committee of Captain Witold Pilecki. Zuzanna just began her sophomore year at South Elgin High School's Beacon Academy of Media and Digital Arts.

Pilecki was a Polish army captain during World War II and a member of the Polish resistance who infiltrated the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1940. Pilecki gathered intelligence at the camp and smuggled messages out about the methods of execution and interrogation. After nearly three years at Auschwitz, he escaped. But after Soviets seized control of Poland, Pilecki was captured by Communists, accused of espionage and shot in 1948.

Zuzanna's short, Polish-language film told the story of Danuta (Inka) Siedzikowna, a Polish girl orphaned by World War II who joined the country's "Home Army" at the age of 15 to resist German and then Soviet occupation. She was captured and executed by Soviets a week before her 18th birthday.

"In my project I was trying to present the heroine as a normal teenager who had a strong love for her country but also as a girl who in those horrible times dared to care for people with enormous dedication and compassion," Zuzanna said. "Inka showed so much bravery and power over oneself that I felt like I needed to show her story to people in a much different way. I

knew that today's viewer might not be interested in the dry facts ... So I created a film that makes the viewer exercise their conscience and put themselves in Inka's shoes so they could see what a phenomenal person she truly was."

Zuzanna and her family traveled to Warsaw in late May to attend the awards ceremony. Not surprisingly, Zuzanna says her favorite subject in school is history, and she is greatly enjoying her film classes at the Beacon Academy.

"I love learning from the past; it shows how complex the human race truly is," she said.

Zuzanna's freshman English teacher, Jane Besch, called her a "model for the student every teacher wants in class. She works diligently to understand the principles in the work assigned and when she needs further directions, she asks questions to further her understanding. She is personable and always faces life with a positive attitude."

Zuzanna will be honored during the Accents on Achievement portion of the Board meeting, along with Jeremy Johnson, a sophomore at Streamwood High School. Jeremy won a gold medal in the 50-meter run of the 2018 Summer Games of the Illinois Special Olympics, held in June on the campus of Illinois State University in Normal.

Jeremy was one of seven U-46 Bluestars who qualified for the state competition by earning a first place in the regional competition of their sport. Jeremy's mother, Cheryl Johnson, said her son's race was the last one before outdoor portions of the games had to be canceled due to extreme heat.

Jeremy has Down syndrome in addition to orthopedic issues that have required braces, casts, and the use of walkers and wheelchairs. Johnson said Jeremy was so excited about his medal that he wore it for a few days straight; it is now displayed on an awards shelf in his bedroom.

"Seeing him overcome the medical complications he had when he was younger is a really big thing for our family," she said.



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Jeremy also competes for the Bluestars in bowling and basketball, and coach Lindsey Reynolds says he always brings a positive attitude no matter the sport or situation.

“There’s not been one time we’ve asked him to do or try something and he has refused; he always gives a head nod, a smile, and an ‘OK!’” she said. “He’s also one of those athletes that if he sees another athlete, or even a competitor on the sidelines, he actively goes out of his way to involve them. He’s incredible.”

The Board of Education will issue the proclamation and recognize the two students with “Accent on Achievement” certificates at 7 p.m. Monday, Aug. 20 in room 140 of the Educational Services Center, 355 E. Chicago St., Elgin.

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School District U-46 serves families in 11 communities: Bartlett, Elgin, Hanover Park, South Elgin, Streamwood and Wayne, as well as portions of Carol Stream, Hoffman Estates, St. Charles, Schaumburg, and West Chicago. In total, the District encompasses 90 square miles within the Fox River Valley, approximately 45 minutes west of downtown Chicago, and includes communities within Cook, DuPage and Kane counties. More than 39,000 pre-K through twelfth graders attend the 57 District schools and programs. To learn more, Visit the U-46 [website](#), or like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).