

Successful fundraiser leads to scholarship fund, future initiatives for Old Town student with autism



Connor Archer (left) walks the track with Old Town High School teacher Steve Dexter, his mentor, who was his cross country coach in middle school. They were on hand at the Victory Field complex on the Old Town High School campus on May 18 for a fundraising event Archer organized, Courageous Steps.

By Ernie Clark, BDN Staff

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OLD TOWN, Maine — Connor Archer revealed to his peers in honors health class earlier this year that he lives with autism.

More recently, the Old Town High School sophomore, a distance runner on the Coyotes' cross country and track teams, showed his classmates and his community that he's not only an advocate for those with similar neurodevelopment disorders but an entrepreneur on their behalf.

"I had a lot of fun," said Archer of his "Courageous Steps" fundraiser held at Victory Field on the school's campus. "I was very happy that day, and a lot of my friends were very happy for me. It was

just amazing.”

The 16-year-old son of Mike and Jessica Archer conceived, organized and directed the event, which included a 1-mile fun walk/run, a competitive 1-mile run, raffles and various children’s activities.

“It was a lot of work, but with the help of a lot of my family and friends, we were able to pull off an event a lot of people probably thought I wouldn’t be able to pull off,” he said.

Nearly 200 people braved a threatening weather forecast to participate in the event and support Archer in his efforts to raise money for two programs that were critical to his development after he was diagnosed with autism at age 3: the Green House Nursery School in Milford and the special education department at Old Town Elementary School.

The Courageous Steps effort far exceeded Archer’s financial expectations, raising more than \$3,700.

“I was thinking around a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars, but the response was overwhelming for this type of endeavor,” said Archer, who also takes numerous honors-level courses, plays trumpet in three school bands and works on the school website at Old Town High School.

“I just want to help other kids with autism or other disabilities to make sure they have a chance to succeed,” he said.

In addition to his originally planned donations to the two school programs, the success of the event will enable Archer to establish the Courageous Steps Scholarship Fund at Old Town High School that will provide for an annual scholarship beginning in 2015.

The scholarship is designed to empower other high school students to identify their own courageous steps and share their journeys, he said.

“I brainstormed this a little while ago,” Archer added. “What I want is to provide a scholarship for a high school senior who has gone through substantial challenges in their life.”

Archer also has created a website — www.thecourageousstepsproject.org.

— that outlines his entire effort in detail.

Archer plans to continue The Courageous Steps Project by expanding the gardens and learning centers he has created at the Green House Nursery School, assisting the Old Town Recreation Department with developing a downtown garden, and speaking to other groups of students and teachers about strategies that have been successful for him as a student with autism.

“I knew I’d end up doing that, but I thought it would be my junior or senior year,” Archer said. “But it all started with that first health class.”

And he’s already planning future activities to support the cause.

“I will be doing this next year,” he said.

Donations for the Courageous Steps Project will be accepted at Old Town High School, c/o

Courageous Steps, 203 Stillwater Ave., Old Town, Maine 04468. Checks should be made payable to Old Town High School (memo: Courageous Steps). All proceeds will be used to support local programs, fundraising efforts and the scholarship fund.

<http://bangordailynews.com/2014/06/04/news/bangor/successful-fundraiser-leads-to-scholarship-fund-future-initiatives-for-old-town-student-with-autism/> printed on July 31, 2014