



The District 49 Dispatch is printed quarterly by
School District 49 - 10850 E Woodmen Rd - Peyton CO 80831-8127.
Postmaster: Direct address changes/corrections to the printers address.

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Vol 3, No. 2 • April 2018

RVES Earns National Recognition for Capturing Kids' Hearts



(District 49/Amy Matisek)

Kate Bock, first grade teacher, personally greets students outside her classroom at RVES April 5. The morning high fives and handshakes take place every day as part of the Capturing Kids' Hearts program.

By Amy Matisek

Internal Communications Manager

An emotionally safe and caring culture is the heart of the Capturing Kids' Hearts program. That environment is seen every day at Ridgeview Elementary School, and it's the commitment of staff that earned the school a Capturing Kids' Hearts National Showcase School Award for the 2017-18 school year.

Four years ago, RVES began an initiative to transform the campus into an emotionally-safe and relationally-connected place for students, staff and parents. The Capturing Kids' Hearts program promotes socio-emotional techniques to foster student engagement. Ultimately, the belief is once you have a child's heart, you have a child's mind. The program was created by the Flippen Group, a management consultant company in Texas.

Thousands of schools have implemented

the program nationwide, and RVES was one of 123 schools to be selected this year as a Capturing Kids' Hearts National Showcase School. The nomination included a rigorous application process, and a site visit from the Flippen Group to gather data and talk with members of the school community.

"This award validates the Ridgeview staff," stated Theresa Ritz, principal. "We are educators because we want to be difference makers in the lives of kids. This award symbolizes the difference our staff is making."

RVES staff and students practice techniques of the Capturing Kids' Hearts program every day throughout the school.

Each day before schools starts, Kim Moore, assistant principal, will be found at the front entrance greeting students with high fives and handshakes as they arrive.

Once a learner arrives at their classroom, they'll find their teacher waiting at the door



(District 49/Amy Matisek)

Cat Case, 10, fifth-grader, on left, and Mady Morales, 11, fifth-grader, help share the news April 5 that Ridgeview Elementary School has been selected as a Capturing Kids' Hearts National Showcase School.

to offer a personal greeting and welcome for the day.

Classes start with sharing "good things." During this time, students are invited to share a good thing in their life. Good things were simple and abundant at the school on April 5.

"My chickens were sold and are going to a safe home," shared Zoey Beanland, 8, second-grader in Mrs. McClure's class. "We'll still be able to get free eggs."

"When my family moves, I won't have to go to a different school," remarked Sevy Draney, 7, second-grader.

"Over the weekend, I went to the pool," said Lilianna Rodriguez-Medina, 5, kindergartner.

Some students at RVES have experienced the Capturing Kids' Hearts culture for many years. Besides sharing good things daily, students and staff are encouraged to

give affirmations to promote positivity. Classrooms also have social contracts in place to hold both students and staff accountable. "Everyone here is so kind and understanding," commented Cat Case, 10, fifth-grader. "They are more like a friend than a teacher."

Classmate Mady Morales, 11, fifth-grader, was quick to add, "Everyone always has a smile on their face, and they encourage you. That gives me a boost."

It's not only the students who sing praises for RVES. "The teachers eat, sleep and live this culture," stated Martha Bundrick, grandparent. "They have embraced it wholeheartedly."

"My kids come home every day and tell me about the good things they shared," said Shawna Ricks, parent. "I know staff have my students' best interest at heart. It's like a family here."

District 49 Released from DOJ Agreement

By David Nancarrow

Director of Communications

School District 49 begins the Spring of 2018 with the conclusion of a multi-year partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice. "Dear Mr. Fletcher," said Lou Fletcher, Director of Culture and Services, while reading from the written DOJ statement. "This letter is to notify the District that we are closing monitoring of the District's compliance with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and are terminating the Agreement."

The directive from the DOJ represents a benchmark achievement after more than eight years of hard work throughout the district. Initially tasked in 2010 to address complaints of harassment and racial discrimination, District 49 recommitted to the agreement with the DOJ in 2014 to resolve lingering concerns.

Now, in 2018, the district credits the commitment to this partnership with laying the groundwork for the D49 Culture of Care, which is built upon a dedication to values like respect and responsibility. Working alongside the DOJ in this effort established the fundamental elements of the district's Cultural Compass, which guides our actions in how we relate to, and treat each other.

The release from the DOJ partnership signifies the district living up to every aspect of the agreement. It does not mean the work is finished. "Although I have many responsibilities now in District 49, this was originally the single purpose for my position," shared Fletcher. "This shows that



(District 49/Aaron Villescas)

Dr. Louis Fletcher, D49
Dir. of Culture and Service

if we work together, we can accomplish anything."

The district will continue to build on the lessons learned through the DOJ collaboration in its pursuit of peak performance. Fletcher will outline ongoing culture and service goals to the D49 Board of Education in April. "The wrong thing to do would be: start to celebrate and say we don't have to do this anymore," Fletcher observed. "[That] is how we get back to a place we don't want to be."

Dr. Fletcher believes the district priorities moving forward include a commitment from the staff to maintain a multicultural approach to education, reaching students with curriculum that ensures differences are not seen as deficiencies, and a focus on restorative practices to encourage constructive, respect-based, relationships throughout the D49 community.

"Human dignity," Fletcher said. "In a nutshell, that's what it's all about."

Falcon Middle School Students Walk Up, Not Out



Hayley Enghaus (on left), 14, eighth-grader, and Jadyn Vignery, 12, seventh-grader, show their excitement for the “walk up” at Falcon Middle School March 14. The event was organized to promote kindness and lessons in inclusion, as an alternative to school walkouts.

By Amy Matisek
Internal Communications Manager

Falcon Middle School ambassadors welcomed fellow classmates to school March 14 with kindness and a lesson in inclusion. Instead of a walkout, on a day when students across the nation were protesting against school violence, Firebird Nation student leaders orchestrated a “walk up.”

The ambassadors, led by teacher Kathy Hancock, came up with the idea and followed suggestions from the movement they found on social media. #WalkUpNotOut is an initiative that encourages students to walk up to at least 17 people and share words of kindness on the one-month anniversary of the school tragedy in Parkland, Fla. The number 17 matches the number of lives lost in Parkland.

“It’s about getting kids to feel okay about themselves and to connect with each other,” stated Hancock. Ambassadors were waiting outside the school’s entrance to greet students as they arrived with a handout about #WalkUpNotOut and a “You are Loved” pin to wear.

To send a message that the community is in this together, deputies from the El Paso County Sheriff’s Office were onsite to support students.

“It was cold outside, but the happier you were, the warmer you became,” shared Tiffany Backeberg, 14, eighth-grader.

“People often have cliques, but I want students to know you can be inviting to others and have even more friends,” said Asher Johnson, 13, eighth-grader.

While the walk up was on a single day, Hancock was quick to share, “This is an everyday thing. Our goal for today and every day is to keep doing things like this.”



Left to right: Jadyn Vignery, 12, seventh-grader; Arwen Rawlinson, 11, sixth-grader; and Taylor Gorbett, 12, sixth-grader, stand ready to greet classmates at the “walk up” at Falcon Middle School March 14. The event was designed to promote supporting peers, as an alternative to school walkouts.





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This newspaper is an authorized publication of District 49. The editorial content of the Dispatch is the responsibility of the District 49 communications department. Tel: 719.495.1151. The email address is info@d49.org. Printed circulation is 32,000 copies.

The Dispatch is printed by Colorado Springs Military Newspaper Group, a private firm in no way connected with District 49. It is published four times per year.

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D49 COO Gives Behind the Scenes Look at Progress of 3B Projects

By David Nancarrow
Director of Communications

Eventually, the sounds of learning will fill the classrooms of Bennett Ranch Elementary School. For now the sound of construction echoes off concrete walls and cavernous ceilings, where crews are working daily to bring the school to life. On Monday, March 12, D49 Chief Operations Officer, Pedro Almeida, led a small group on a tour of the building which sits just north of the campus of Falcon Middle School. The visit gave members of the Board of Education a chance to walk the halls and see the school taking shape.

“The progress made throughout our district in less than 18 months is remarkable,” said BOE Secretary, Dave Cruson.

“Since the Board of Education serves as the representatives of our constituents, it is extremely important to help them stay informed of key projects throughout D49,” Almeida said.

The visit to BRES was one of seven locations the group visited in addition to the district’s three major high schools: Falcon, Vista Ridge and Sand Creek. Each of the schools is getting a major facility upgrade financed by the November, 2016, MLO 3B ballot initiative.

“This tour of our projects really helps our board members understand exactly how we are spending taxpayer dollars,” said Almeida. “These major projects, along with dozens of smaller projects throughout the district focused on safety, security, and school functionality, will be significant boosts to our academic environment.”

“The success of 3B is evident not only in the physical appearance of all of our schools, but also in the pride our students, teachers, and staff have in and about their school,” Cruson added.

The group also stopped at Odyssey Elementary to see one of the district’s safe-entryways. The double-door design directs all visitors through a main entry point and steers them to the front office where they can be screened before getting into the school. At the conclusion of spring break, the work to add these entryways at all D49 operated schools was edging closer to completion. The remaining three schools (Stetson Elementary, Skyview Middle and Falcon Legacy Campus) will have their secure entryways installed over the summer.

“The MLO 3B projects are coming along quite well,” said Almeida, pointing out BRES and ALLIES are on schedule to open at the start of the 2018 - 2019 school year. Work on another, yet unnamed, school in the Banning Lewis Ranch neighborhood is scheduled to start in April and expected to open for students in the fall of 2019.



D49 COO Pedro Almeida (right) discusses progress at BRES Monday, March 12

(District 49/Aaron Villegas)

Patriot High School Students Encourage Peer Support



By Amy Bremser
Media and Television Broadcasting Specialist

Patriot High School students received leadership training from the Sources of Strength peer intervention program, Feb. 26.

The Sources of Strength is an international training program that teaches prevention for suicide, violence, bullying and substance abuse.


Freshman Jordan Fouschi, 16, said the program helps students through tough times and "they'll know they're not alone and it's not going to last forever."

Dan Adams, Director of Training for Sources of Strength, said students need to learn how to cope and use intervention skills so "when we do hit tough times in life, we're more easily able to overcome those difficulties because we have resilience, and we've practiced it."

"I feel like I finally have a voice and someone can finally listen to me," said senior Ashley Clark, 18.

Students in the Sources of Strength group at PHS have already started projects such as posters listing reasons to be grateful for the program in hopes of creating more peer support in the school. Their goal is to create awareness and boost morale.


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Kaleb Moore, 17, junior at Vista Ridge High School, helping build a church in Mexico.



Noah Hendrix, 11, sixth-grader from Falcon Middle School, playing for CBA: 11U AA baseball travel team in Louisville, Colorado.



Marie Spero and Sarah Kalis, special education teacher at Vista Ridge High School, seeing Hamilton in Chicago.



Catherine Delperdang, fifth-grader at SSAE; Elizabeth Delperdang, fourth-grader at SSAE; Brendan Delperdang, first-grader at MRES, and dad, Vince Delperdang at Mount Rushmore.



Katie Ellenberger, 14, freshman at Vista Ridge High School, with her mother, Melissa Ellenberger, music teacher at Woodmen Hills Elementary School, skiing at Monarch.



Mya Christensen, 10, fifth-grader and Cody Christensen, 8, third-grader, from Meridian Ranch Elementary enjoying the Sand Dunes.



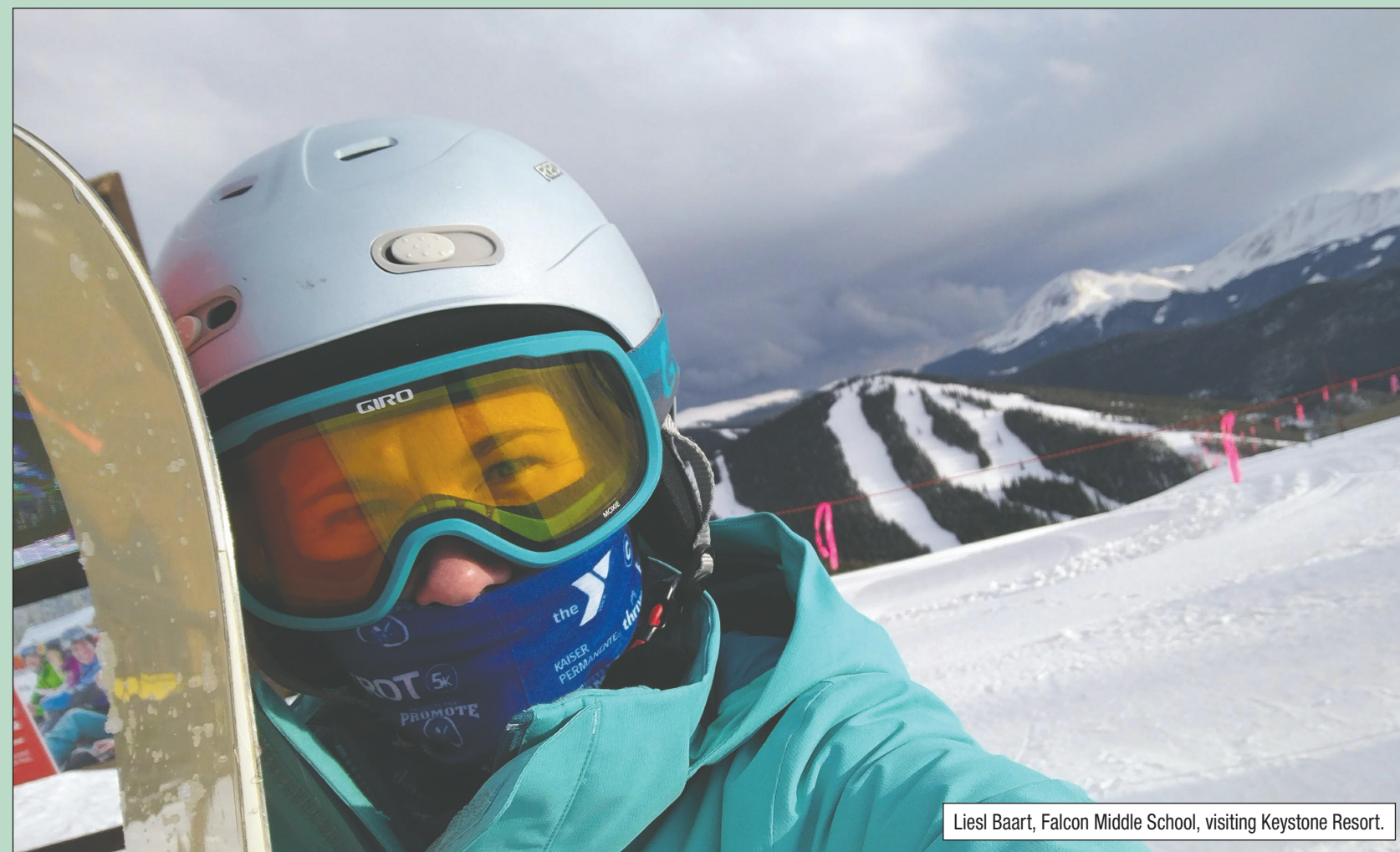
Jackson Dempkey, 11, fifth-grader and Lillian Dempkey, 10, fourth-grader, both from Banning Lewis Ranch Academy, during Spring Break in Albuquerque.



Nico Petrocelli, 13, seventh-grader at Falcon Middle School.



Alyviah Romero, 4, future Ridgeview Elementary School Husky, plays outside during spring break.



Liesl Baart, Falcon Middle School, visiting Keystone Resort.



Kennedy Kalis, 5, Ridgeview Elementary School, and mom, Sarah Kalis, special education teacher at Vista Ridge High School.

Disaster Drill Tests HMS Health Science Students



(District 49/Amy Matisek)



(District 49/Amy Matisek)

Ben Wendland, 14, treats his patient, Antonia Molina Mendez, 14, during a mock emergency at Horizon Middle School March 7. Health science students were able to practice medical skills during the simulated disaster.

Ashley Valenzuela, 13, gets advice from a paramedic on how to treat her patient, Emileigh Rathke, 14, during a mock disaster drill at Horizon Middle School March 7. The drill provided health science students with an opportunity to practice emergency medicine skills.

By Amy Matisek
Internal Communications Manager

Skills learned in health science class at Horizon Middle School came to life March 7 during a make-believe emergency.

The mock disaster started with a power plant explosion. From there, students role played. Some were patients with pretend wounds and ailments. Others were medical professionals practicing emergency skills such as tying a tourniquet, assessing patient conditions and administering blood. Paramedics from AMR, nurses from Penrose Hospital and firefighters from Cimarron Hills Fire Department were all onsite to advise the students.

“The ability to help kids see there can be calm during chaos is a good lesson to learn,” shared Leah Grissom, firefighter with the Cimarron Hills Fire Department. “When you have knowledge, you can simplify the situation.”

Students are eighth-graders in William Yerger’s health science class. “Everything I teach is project based,” stated Yerger. “Students learn the content and then apply it.” This was the first year for a real-life disaster drill in his classroom.

“The idea of the drill was to expose students to emergency situations in the medical field,” remarked Yerger. “Those students who begin to feel like a healthcare profession is for them can be introduced to the Academy of Health Sciences at Falcon High School as a pathway.” In addition, students were able to complete CPR certification during the course.

Students had similar opinions on how the disaster drill made them feel. “It was stressful, but we learned to work together as a team and connect,” said Emileigh Rathke, 14.

Delia Case, 13, is considering the healthcare field for a career. “I learned this is hard ... it’s harder than it looks,” Case commented.



DLR Group
Architecture Engineering Planning Interiors

(Credit: DLR Group)

New School Rendering

Save the Date: School Groundbreaking

Help D49 celebrate the first phase of construction with a groundbreaking ceremony for the district's newest school, scheduled to open August, 2019

When: 4:00 p.m. Tuesday, May 15

Where: Immediately North of Banning Lewis Preparatory Academy Campus: 9433 Vista Del Pico Blvd, Colorado Springs, CO 80927

What: Groundbreaking, VIP remarks, and the district will take audience input on naming the new school

EIES Students Soar to New Heights with NASA Astronaut

By Sam Dosen-Himelrick
Digital Communications Manager

Evans International Elementary School students had a unique look into an astronaut’s life at a school wide assembly, March 2. Duane “Digger” Carey, NASA Astronaut and USAF Lieutenant Colonel (ret.), presented a video to students explaining an astronaut’s life in space.

Carey is a former Air Force A-10A Thunderbolt II, F-16C, and test pilot for the United States Air Force. In 1996, Carey joined NASA as a space shuttle pilot. In 2001, he was the pilot for the space shuttle Columbia, spending 11 days in space in support of the Hubble Space Telescope mission.

During the assembly, students watched a narrated video on life in space, learning how astronauts eat, sleep, and work in space in zero gravity.

“Anyone that cares about the future, which is most people,” said Carey, “the surest way to have an effect on the future is to interact with kids.”

Carey currently works with the Space Foundation in Colorado Springs, speaking publicly nationwide to schools and corporations.

“It was great having Lt. Col. Digger here along with the team from the Space Foundation Discovery Center,” said Brett Wiltz, Dean of Students. “There are few things that capture children and drive their curiosity in the same way that space can. You could feel their excitement as they listened to what it was like to actually go to space. As Digger pointed out to one group of students, they will be the ones that travel to Mars in the coming years and what they do and learn today is moving them toward those great achievements.”

After the assembly, students had the opportunity to work on experiments with Discovery Center educators in their classrooms.



(District 49/Sam Dosen-Himelrick)

Lt. Col. Duane Carey takes students on a trip to space with ship commanders, Jaylen Singletary, 8, fourth-grade and Cheyenne Bowman, 11, fifth-grade during a school wide assembly at Evans International Elementary School.



ALLIES Construction Underway, On Schedule

By Aaron Villescascas
Marketing and Communications Specialist

District 49’s vision is to be the best choice in public education. We constantly work to create new educational environments so that everyone associated with D49 is always learning, working and leading us to be the best.

One of the newest additions to our portfolio of schools is the new building construction currently underway for ALLIES (Academy for Literacy, Learning & Innovation Excellence). The new facility will be located beside Odyssey Elementary School at 6275 Bridlespur Avenue. The construction is on schedule to be completed in time to welcome students for the next school year.

ALLIES inspires students with language-based learning difficulties and characteristics of Dyslexia to celebrate their strengths and overcome struggles to prepare them for success. “The staff and students at ALLIES are excited to welcome friends and families into our brand new facility opening Fall 2018,” shared Rebecca Thompson, M.Ed., Director of Academic Affairs. “We have been building a family this year with the amazing gifts our students bring and the dedicated staff who believe that every struggling student can ‘take flight’ in reading.”

Once the building is complete, the staff at ALLIES will be able to serve twice the number of students per school year compared to previous years. Learn more about the school at www.d49.org/chooseALLIES.



(District 49/Aaron Villescascas)

Progress is being made in every corner of the new ALLIES building as crews work over every detail in the new school. The in-the-works facility was last toured March 30.

Voice
Of the
Community

Learning From the Voice of the Community

By David Nancarrow
Director of Communications

In February, District 49 started gathering public feedback about consolidating the regional and colloquial characteristics of our community into a single, widely recognizable, district identity. Although the district’s legal name is El Paso County School District 49, you may recall that in 2015, the district transitioned away from traditional references to Falcon School District 49 in favor of simply District 49. At that time the district also introduced the logo we use today featuring District 49 paired with a stylized visual of a pathway to excellence winding up and around Pikes Peak.

In February and March, more than 2,000 people completed a Voice of the Community Survey about aspects of the proposal to consolidate a single legal and common identity. Respondents identified important areas of agreement, as well as proposals where there is not any majority support. For example, a majority agrees that growth and time have expanded the district beyond the traditional use of Falcon to identify the entire district while a majority also agree that D49 should exclusively use Falcon to refer to the schools in that zone. They also believe D49 will continue to excel as a regional provider of education, but that the district should preserve its existing investment in signage and other items by retaining the current logo. The only point of non-agreement was on adopting a specific name going forward. About 35% of respondents supported the proposal to adopt Pikes Peak District 49, but a majority of respondents opposed that name—suggesting a wide range of alternate identities with many favoring the simplicity of District 49.

The Board of Education listened closely to the initial feedback and directed district leaders to continue learning about community preferences for a district identity. In addition to a second poll (poll can be found online at www.d49.org) to gather perspectives about some of the names suggested in response to the earlier survey, the district is actively seeking input from school committees, community leaders, and the District Advisory and Accountability Committee. The BOE will apply what they have learned, and new input, to a decision at a future board meeting to determine the district’s next steps.

Waters Drifts into Life as World-Class Athlete

By Amy Matisek
Internal Communications Manager

Determination and hard work. That's what took Jacob Waters, 17, twelfth-grader at Springs Studio for Academic Excellence, from being born with a birth defect to world-class athlete. Waters competed in the Para-cycling World Championships in Rio De Janeiro, March 22-25. He placed third, earning a bronze medal in the 1 km time trial, and fourth in the 4 km pursuit event. Waters was one of two U.S. athletes who earned medals at this year's World Championships.

Waters was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana with Jackson Weiss Syndrome, a rare disease that caused the bones in his lower left leg to be deformed or missing. By the time Waters was 10 years old, he had gone through four surgeries to correct the condition. "It always hurt to walk, and I could never do what all the other kids were doing," shared Waters.

In 2010, Waters was walking in a field when his horse got scared and kicked him on the left side of his lower back. The incident lacerated his spleen, shattered a kidney and caused internal bleeding, requiring another hospital stay.

Waters recovered from the accident and continued growing like any young boy, except in his left leg and foot. Concerned doctors wanted to perform yet another surgery.

That is when Waters decided on his own to amputate his foot and part of his leg. "I had heard of amputees doing things," said Waters. "I knew there was a better way to live."

Two months after the amputation, Waters got his first prosthetic. When a friend mentioned he was competing in a triathlon, Waters decided he would participate too. He had always liked most sports, including cycling.

Then in Summer 2013 came true inspiration. The Wounded Warriors Amputee Softball Team was playing in his hometown. "It was really great to see them play, since they all wore

prosthetics," Waters commented. "I gained confidence and motivation to do so much more."

From there, Waters blossomed as a cyclist. Just two years later, Waters had raced in 30 local races and two national events. In some competitions, he was racing against para-athletes like himself, and in others, he was racing able-bodied athletes. "I didn't like losing, so I kept riding," Waters remarked.

Elevating his riding meant training in a world-class facility. Waters came to Colorado Springs to train at the U.S. Olympic Training Center January 2017. As a high schooler, he needed a way to train as a top para-athlete and be a student at the same time.

That's when Waters found Springs Studio for Academic Excellence. "Jacob is one of three U.S. Olympic Training Center athletes at SSAE," shared Jodi Fletcher, principal. "Another 70 students are high performance participants in ice hockey, wrestling, dance and gymnastics." The school caters to elite athletes offering blended learning with a few days each week in the classroom and some instruction online.

At national competitions, Waters has brought home three titles in cycling. One of those championship titles was against able-bodied athletes. At the world competition in Colorado Springs last December, Waters earned three medals, including one gold.

Waters is overflowing with thanks for people who helped start his journey as a para-cyclist. Steve Katchur, a pro-cyclist in Europe for 10 years, was his first coach. "He taught me how to be a good rider and got me to where I am today," Waters stated. "The Bicycle Superstore in Lake Charles has always made sure I got good deals on bikes."

Fletcher had her own thanks for Waters. "Jacob has brought exciting energy and southern charm to our school," commented Fletcher. "He has a motivating story for our students about overcoming any obstacle."



(District 49/Amy Matisek)

Jacob Waters, SSAE student and world-class para-cyclist, shares a few of the medals he has received in competitions. Most recently, Waters competed at the world championships March 22 - 25 in Rio de Janeiro.



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