Changing the World, One Act of Kindness at a Time

Inspirational local teen wins first place in a statewide speech competition with his moving message of kindness

by Shelley Ouellette

The world is often a very scary place. One of cruelty, sadness and pain. Yet, in this world, there are people who are beacons of hope who show love to others in spite of those facts. You would probably call them regular people, but I call them the heroes of tomorrow. They're not the heroes we see in our mass media, people who are glorified trying to change the world, using violence and war. Rather, they are people who stand up for peace and love amongst a world of hate and pain. I believe that each one of us has the potential to change the world.

excerpt from Letter to the Heroes of Tomorrow

These are the words of Edward Grillo. A 17-year-old Seminole County high-school student with a passion for anything high-tech, Edward also possesses the unique ability to find life's rare silver lining even when it has dealt him the darkest challenges. It is that talent that inspired Edward to pen a 1,268-word Letter to the Heroes of Tomorrow, which he recently recited during the 2018 Statewide Jeannie Amendola Speech & Research Competition.

The competition is sponsored by The Able Trust, a nonprofit public-private partnership designed to give Floridians with disabilities opportunities for successful employment, and the contest is open to students in its High School High Tech Program (HSHT). The goal is to help high schoolers develop the research, public speaking, and communication skills that are critical to successful employment and career growth. Not only did Edward
refine those skills, he took home the competition's first-place honors and, along the way, he developed the confidence to put his letter's themes of kindness and communication into action. It's an impressive achievement for someone who has faced adult-like adversity at such a young age.

"Prior to losing my dad, a Navy veteran, to cancer in May, I lived in a household with parents dealing with mental challenges, but they always provided great inspiration and instilled a lot of positive values in me," Edward says. "Those values inspired my speech. The small things in life are the things that can change the world. Your voice may seem small now, but speak out for what you believe in. A small act can make all the difference in the world."

According to Edward's mentor Prita Chhabra, the HSHT program coordinator for Community Based Care of Central Florida, he lives these values daily.

"Edward has always been kind," says Prita. "If he finishes a project first, he will help out his fellow students and show them how to complete the activities. He always says thank you for every opportunity and says hello to everyone he meets. He's eager to learn and grow, and he's an excellent student to have in the program. Edward never gives up, and I think that's the number-one reason why he won the contest. He practiced every day and took it very seriously. Kindness matters to him, and he shows it in his actions every day."

Edward plans to put his passion for kindness and the words of his speech into action this fall.

"The speech competition inspired me to spread the message, to be the example and to start doing positive acts -- it was as if I was preaching to myself to get out and put my words into action," Edward says. "That is why I'm launching Kind Acts Month (#KindActsMonth) to build kindness awareness. I want people to dedicate a month to acts of kindness such as complimenting strangers on the street, sitting with someone who's alone, delivering a box of chocolates and a card to a friend who's not expecting it, and treating yourself to something special because it's important to be kind to ourselves, as well."

Wise beyond his years, Edward says it's up to us to change the world.

"Be the example everyone will follow," he says. "Go out and change the world, one act of kindness at a time."