



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Aug. 16, 2015

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Alaska National Guard

Son of Alaska Air Guard colonel named Air National Guard Youth of the Year

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — He is confident yet equally humble, a combination of qualities often not found in youth. Compounded with accomplishment, Brice Wilbanks, now entering his sophomore year at South Anchorage High School, made the perfect candidate to receive the 2015 Air National Guard Youth of the Year award, for which he was recognized at a ceremony here Aug. 14.

His mother, Col. Patty Wilbanks, commander of the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Mission Support Group, nominated him for the award because she felt he possessed the right qualities to be competitive in the national contest.

"I saw the application [for the award] through the system," she said, "and given what it was and what he's done, I thought that he was exceptionally competitive."

His enthusiasm at the possibility of being nominated, like his passion for videography and technology on which many of his qualifying accomplishments were based, was a mix of both excitement and modesty.

The award is part of the Military Youth of the Year program from the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and is a component of the National Youth of the Year program. According to the club's website, the program is designed to recognize members of clubs located military installations who have overcome enormous odds and demonstrated exceptional character and accomplishments.

What characteristics and accomplishments make one competitive?

After the ceremony, Brice spoke candidly about his efforts to help build his school's media program. Photos he took on his phone showed a studio commensurate with that of a small-scale news agency, complete with multiple sets, monitors, lighting fixtures and cameras.

"Mr. Butterfield, his video program teacher, created the program for the first time this year," said Patty Wilbanks. "He's a great teacher, and he's kind of a mentor to Brice. He got KTVA to donate a bunch of cameras, and they run a no-kidding news studio."

While children in Anchorage are enjoying their last week of summer, Brice has already been working with the principal and members of the video program to put together broadcast pieces ready for the first day of school.

"I really love it," he said, enthusiastically.

Brice said he feels a certain responsibility to the program, taking the initiative to help build it up through construction projects in the studio as well implementing an inventory control for all of the expensive equipment.

“Basically, I created a serial number system for all of our gear,” he said, “and then when somebody needs to use a camera or something, they check it out of the system.”

Brice also developed a smart-phone application for his school.

“He got into app building back in the seventh grade; he basically taught himself how to build the apps on his own,” said his mother.

“Just for fun,” added Brice.

The app, called the Wild Wolverine, allows the school’s administration to connect with students and their parents to get messages back to them. Since its adoption by the school, his app has been downloaded over 1,700 times, he said.

“They do a morning broadcast show through his video program, and people can watch them through this app,” said Wilbanks. “You can get on the app and read what’s going on, or you can watch the videos. You can go [to another part of the app] and check on their grades.”

It was because of this app that his teacher recommended Brice to the Anchorage Education Association, which led to Brice getting contracted to build another app.

“They seemed to be really happy with it,” Brice said.

Once he had a paying contract for the new app, Brice decided to contract a friend to do the design artwork, which had its share of ups and downs, involving delays and renegotiations between he and his friend on compensation. The experience, his mother said, taught him a lot about business.

“He’s always working on something,” said Patty Wilbanks. “My daughter is more like a normal kid. She plays soccer and when she’s not playing soccer, she’s playing video games or something. But he always has a project, and then he’ll have another one, and another one, and so on. It’s just different from others his age.”

“It’s actually kind of annoying for mom and dad,” she added, laughing. “We’ll be out on the boat or something, and he’ll be like, ‘I need to get home to upload this’ or ‘I don’t have time to kayak’ because he’s always so motivated to work on this projects.”

So where does this ethic and motivation come from?

“I don’t know where it comes from,” said Wilbanks. “He just kind of took to the computers, and he has a very creative mind. You know how you have computer people who are very engineering-minded? He’s not. He’s more of a creative person.”

When Brice was a kindergartner, she explained, they looked at putting him in a school that was heavily rooted in traditional curriculum, based on the standard reading, writing and mathematical courses of study, without much of a creative outlet for students. But the teachers recommended against it.

“Even back then,” said Wilbanks, “his teachers said that it wouldn’t work for him, because he’s too creatively minded. So when we put him in this German school, it worked really well. When you learn a

language that young, it just unlocks something in your brain. I mean, he's well past me. I use him as my tech support."

Winning the award allowed Brice to travel to San Antonio, Texas last month to attend a workshop with other nominees from other branches of the service. Brice said he enjoyed the experience, and that it was a good opportunity.

"I learned a lot about leadership down there," he said.

During the ceremony at which Brice received his award, Col. Blake Gettys, commander of the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Wing, also presented him with a letter of thanks from Lt. Gen. Stanley Clarke III, director of the Air National Guard.

Despite the recognition, Brice said he feels uncomfortable with some of the connotations of being selected for the award, stating that it is not about the recognition, but the work it took to get there.

"I don't like ego," he said. "You can't let your ego get the best of you, and I try to avoid it as much as possible. If you let your ego get the best of you, you lose what matters most. I'm not motivated by that kind of thing; what motivates me is just doing my work."

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