

Council Page program offers youth glimpse into legislative process

San Jose resident experiences contentious deliberation

By Phyllis Bell-Davis
Resident Community News

For youth aspiring to leadership, learning about the local legislative process through the Jacksonville City Council Page program is a great place to start. As a Council Page, students gain firsthand knowledge of how the legislative body makes the laws that govern the way of life for the citizens of Jacksonville.

"Last year, students from 13 local schools and other community organizations were Pages. The program is open to eight-year-olds through college-level students," explained Carol Owens, chief of Legislative Services, who has coordinated the program since 2005. "We receive Page recommendations from public, private and home schools, college freshmen and community organizations such as 4-H and Scouting groups. It helps if the student has a good attention span."

Owens noted that when recommending a Page, her office needs to know what school or organization the individual represents, a phone number, date the individual wants to volunteer, and name of the person making the recommendation.

The Page can be recommended to the Office of Legislative Services by a parent or City Council staff as well. According to Sally Hazelip, City Council staff contacted her son, Collin Hazelip, to be a Page after they saw a newspaper article honoring him as a "Remarkable Senior."

Collin, who has Down syndrome, served as Page during 2016 when he was a San Jose



Sally Hazelip, Collin Hazelip, City Councilman Greg Anderson

Forest resident and student at North Florida School of Special Education.

"It was a good experience and a lot of fun hearing everybody's points of view and listening to the debates. Now when I'm in my politic mode, I know how to make a point and how to successfully argue my point," explained Collin about the impact of being a Page.

Once the Page is appointed, they are required to arrive by 4:45 p.m. on the day of the City Council meeting. The full Council meets at City Hall on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 5 p.m., with the exception of meeting once in July and in December. Because the meetings are held primarily on school nights, the Page is dismissed at 8 p.m.

Owens said at least two Pages per Council meeting are used but there has been up to four Pages at a meeting. "We try to accommodate the organization/individual's request to serve, based on staff's needs. Also a Page can serve more than once."

"Sometimes we don't get the clear picture of how things are done and it's good to meet the people who are making the decisions."

— Sally Hazelip, North Florida School of Special Education

The Page is responsible for making sure the comment cards are collected from individuals who wish to address the City Council during the public hearing or public comment section of the day's agenda, and disseminated properly. The Page also makes sure each Council member has the various handouts and notes needed during the meeting. For their service, the Council president gives the Page a special token and poses for a photo with the Page.

"Collin loved being a Page! I think he felt like he was in the big league," said his mother. "There are a couple of Councilmen who are members of the church we attend and it was a great thing for Collin to see them in a different place, working hard for the community."

Sally, who is Head of School at North Florida School of Special Education, highly recommends the City Council Page program.

"I've attended many City Council meetings, which were all eye-opening experiences. When possible, families should get involved in community events, especially City Council meetings," she said. "Sometimes we don't get the clear picture of how things are done and it's good to meet the people who are making the decisions."

Sally added that during Collin's experience, there was a very significant discussion concerning a restaurant and the parking associated with same. She said, "On the way home, Collin commented, 'Boy, they really had a lot to work out! They had to make some big decisions. Not all people get along, do they?'"

Sally said it was a teachable moment which led to Collin's understanding that, although the members were divided, it takes cooperation to get things done in the community. "You can see meetings on TV but to be involved personally, it makes me appreciate our leaders, and the way decisions are made. It's great to know that there's a program in place to give our young people an idea of how government works on this level," she said. "I salute the City for having this type of program that gives our children an option to be engaged in something that is very important."

Collin agreed the program is a great way to get involved. "Our leaders need your help!" he said.

To become a City Council Page, contact Owens' office at (904) 630-1404.

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San Marco students reach out to hurricane victims

As part of a recently created initiative, Positively Assisting Within School (PAWS) at Julia Landon College Preparatory School in San Marco, students collected new and gently used items of clothing, toys, books, school supplies, bedding, and toiletries as well as nonperishable food to assist hurricane victims.

Tables were set up in the school's courtyard Oct. 7 for local victims to pick up much-needed items. Some of the donations were added to a pallet for Hurricane Maria victims in Puerto Rico; other items were disbursed to various local faith-based groups. Donations of pet supplies were delivered to Animal Care and Protective Services.



Julia Landon College Preparatory School seventh-grade students clothing and organize donations for hurricane victims.

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