

Shining Star

I'm proud to introduce you to Aaron Ott, a 17-year old young man with Down syndrome who lives in Southwest Allen County. I first met Aaron this summer, after he had been crowned Prom King at Homestead High School.

Being parents of a four-year-old who has Down syndrome, Randy and I are always anxious to meet older children and young adults who also have Ds. We decided that our whole family would visit with Aaron and his parents, and took our two boys with us to the Otts' home. When we arrived, Aaron greeted us at the door and we were immediately impressed with his quick wit and sharp sense of humor. Aaron broke the ice by showing us his photo albums (a real treat for me!), which were a gift from his sister. He proudly showed us pictures of himself with his nieces, his 12th birthday party, his high school friends, and, of course, himself at the Prom.

While Aaron treated us to peanut butter cookies that he baked, he told us a little bit more about himself. He is now a senior at Homestead. He loves art class and hates math. He rides the bus home from school every day. In many ways, he is a typical teenage boy — he really enjoys attending athletic events and listening to different types of music.

The goal of the DSANI Shining Star is to recognize all members of the Down syndrome community, not only those who accomplish great things. To nominate an individual who has Down syndrome or a family member or professional who has contributed to the Down syndrome community, please call DSANI at 492-9927.

Aaron Ott

His chores at home include cleaning the house and cutting the grass. He enjoys playing the guitar and bowls in a weekly league outside of school. He plays basketball and golf, likes to watch tennis, and is a Green Bay Packers fan. At the end of this school year, he hopes to work at Meijer. He also wants his dad to teach him to drive.

Aaron's parents, Garrett and Olympia, emphasized that it has been important throughout his life that he be treated like other kids. They have expected the same behavior from Aaron that they did from their two older children, and disciplined him the same way, as well. He attended preschool at St. Michael's Lutheran Church and was the first student with Down syndrome to attend Lafayette Elementary School. After taking special classes, he was confirmed in the Lutheran Church. The Otts have visited school sometimes daily over the years, making sure that Aaron is receiving assignments and homework like every other student.

A turning point for Aaron in school, according to Garret, when Aaron became a basketball team manager at Homestead. It was then that Aaron really felt included in the high school experience. As manager, Aaron attends all basketball games and sits with the team. He takes care of the players' needs for water bottles and towels, among other things. It is clear that the guys on the team and the cheerleaders are Aaron's friends. He showed us pictures of last year's championship game, where he climbed the ladder, just like the players, to cut down a piece of the net.

When asked about being crowned Prom King, Aaron is truly proud. In May, he was elected by the Junior



and Senior classes to be one of the 10 boys and 10 girls on Prom Court. Accompanied by his sister and her husband, he took his girlfriend Julie to the Factory Restaurant for dinner, and then went to the Prom. Garret and Olympia were also at the Prom to celebrate when it was announced that Aaron had been chosen King. After spending an evening with him and his parents, I can understand why Aaron's schoolmates would elect him Prom King. He is a fun guy to be with, and I can honestly say that our lives, and our understanding of living with Down syndrome, are better for having met him.

— Jen Pickard

