

WINSTON-SALEM/FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS GRADUATES

Senior at Parkland defies odds of cancer

BY KIM UNDERWOOD
WINSTON-SALEM/FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS

At Parkland, Alexis Fegan has been a cheerleader and a co-captain of the volleyball squad. After she learned in September that she had cancer, she had to sit out the final two games of the volleyball season.

She didn't want to stop coming to school, though.

"I decided to physically go to school when I didn't have chemo and radiation," said Fegan. "I didn't want to let cancer stop me from finishing out my high school career."

Fegan attends both Parkland High School and the Career Center, where she takes English IV Honors and AP (advanced-placement) government and politics. With the help of counselors and teachers at both schools, she finds a way to make it all work. As necessary, she takes time off for treatment and recovery and then returns to school.

"All of my teachers and counselors have been helping me," she said.

"She faced the adversity with grace, determination and unmatched maturity," said Kathryn Hauser, teacher of AP Literature and English IV Honors at the Career Center.

Hauser also said even when she wasn't able to physically be in class, Fegan was diligent about finding out what work she needed to do and having the work completed when she did return to class.

"Her sense of responsibility and work ethic was amazing, given the physical demands of her diagnosis," said Hauser. "Alexis had the rare ability to see beyond her diagnosis and maintain her academic pursuits of graduation and college acceptance. Cancer did not define her, as she arrived back in class with a gregarious smile and triumphant spirit. Without cancer, Alexis is an excellent student and young woman; with cancer, Alexis is a remarkable role model."

At Parkland, Fegan serves as a technology assistant. She works with Mitch Baiada, a technology education teacher and the school's technology facilitator.

Baiada described her as "smart, social, kind, and an amazing positive spirit."

He knows that it has been a trying process for her, but she has come through.



Alexis Fegan

"What an amazing spirit!" sums it up," he said. People in Fegan's world outside of school have also been quite supportive. She works at the Chick-fil-A on Peters Creek Parkway in southern Winston-Salem.

"I love it," she said. "It's the people." After storeowner Peter Zimmerman learned about her illness, he organized a Spirit Night. He had special T-shirts printed and a committed percentage of sales to help with her medical expenses.

For a time, Fegan was not able to work. She has been declared cancer-free and was able to return to work about a month ago.

Fegan had synovial sarcoma. It's a soft-tissue cancer that is quite rare. She has had several surgeries in addition to radiation and chemotherapy.

When she first learned that she had cancer, she found it hard to believe. High school was supposed to be a time to enjoy life, she thought.

"It's supposed to be the best time of your life, and then everything flips upside down."

Ultimately, dealing with cancer has taught her a lot. "It was a wake-up call to enjoy life...I have learned to really cherish every moment...I have also learned to never give up," said Fegan.

She also said her oncologist, Dr. Thomas Russell, has been a big help.

"Going into it I wasn't the most optimistic person. He gave me a lot of hope that I didn't have in the beginning."

She added the whole process has also strengthened her faith in God.

One of the funny aspects of it, she mentioned, is her hair, or lack thereof. Long before cancer came along she would joke with people about cutting off all of her hair. After the diagnosis, she didn't wait for the treatments to cause her to lose her hair. She just went ahead and shaved it.

"I actually like the look," she said. Fegan's mother, Vivian, said that her daughter has

always taken a positive approach to life and has always been strong. When her daughter learned about the cancer, Vivian Fegan said, "She never had this woe-is-me mentality. I think it made her more determined."

Vivian Fegan said that having a daughter who was so determined has helped her deal with everything. "I am so very proud of her and how she has handled everything."

One thing that was particularly hard for her daughter, Vivian Fegan said, was sitting out the final two games of the volleyball season.

Fegan has long been quite active. She was a cheerleader for two years. She started playing volleyball in seventh grade and has played volleyball for Parkland since her sophomore year.

This season, she was one of three captains on the girls' teams.

Fegan was born in Georgia. Her father, James Fegan, works for Reynolds American, and his job overseeing manufacturing machinery brought the family here.

Fegan is an only child. She started school at Ward Elementary and then went to Clemmons Middle until Flat Rock Middle opened. During her sophomore year in high school, she became interested in law and government.

"I want to become an attorney," she said.

She plans to go to Appalachian State University and major in criminal justice. When she goes, she hopes to play intramural volleyball and to see how that goes.

"I am ready to get back my old lifestyle," she said.

After college and law school, she can envision working at first as a defense attorney in a practice with a couple of other attorneys. She pictures herself staying late in her office becoming as prepared as it's possible to be.

"I want to make the opposition sweat when they see me walk into the courtroom," she said.

She already spends time examining documents related to various cases.

"I even read the judges' statement on why they go one way and not the other," she said.

She definitely imagines herself becoming a judge at some point. Who knows? Perhaps that path will go as far as the Supreme Court one day or she could go in another direction, such as running for office.

"Becoming a lawyer is my stepping stone," she said.

The graduation ceremony for Parkland is scheduled for Saturday, June 6 in the Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum Annex.

Triumph over tragedy for Mount Tabor senior

BY KIM UNDERWOOD
WINSTON-SALEM/FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS

As a star running back for Mount Tabor High School, James Antoine was a target of college recruits. Antoine has long made the point, though, that he doesn't want to be known simply as an athlete but as an athlete who is also a good student. He is also known as someone who cares about others and who has a winning smile.

"James is an amazing individual," said counselor Corey Daniel.

Everyone at the school knows him, and he is the sort of person who will ask teachers how they are doing and mean it when he does.

"He genuinely cares for others and he wants to see people succeed," said Daniel.

"I have known James since he was a freshman in my business class," said Kimberly Wilcox, marketing education teacher. "On the first day I met him, I thought he had to be a senior."

That was because of way in which he carried himself and the maturity of his behavior.

"Since that very first day, he has always been polite, intelligent and a natural-born leader," said Wilcox. "He has a contagious personality that makes even the worst of days seem okay. He is quick to step up and set positive examples for his peers as well as work with students who are not reaching their potential. He is always willing to help others, even if it inconveniences himself - a true student athlete who always puts school first and clearly excelled on the field as well."

Football coach R. Laymarr Marshall noted that Antoine was a two-time 1,000-yard rusher, a two-time All Conference player and an All Region player as a senior. As a three-year starter, Antoine had more than 40 career touchdowns and served as team captain as a senior.

"James is an exceptional student athlete and great young man," said Marshall. "He has a rare combination of great athlete, exceptional academic prowess, and impeccable character. With all of those things going for him he remains very humble and embraces the notion that he is a role model to his peers and to generations younger than he."

At Mount Tabor, Antoine participated in the Teacher Cadet program, which sends high school students into elementary and middle schools to help teachers as they work with students. He worked with the students at Jefferson Elementary School. He enjoys elementary students in part because they are so funny and so open.

"They will say whatever," Antoine said.

Antoine also said that he loves to smile and laugh, and that he loves to see others smile and laugh so he does what he can to make that happen.

Antoine has had much to deal with in his life. He started life in Akron, Ohio where his mother was murdered ten years ago. He then moved to Winston-Salem to live with his father, Chris Boston.

These days, Antoine can joke about having to learn to drink sweet tea and to ask for "soda" rather than "pop." However at the time, it was rough to make the transition to a new world while dealing with the loss of his mother.

"It hurt a lot," he said.

He thinks about her every single day and wishes that she were still here. His father has been a great source of support, he said.

"His personal story is one of great triumph over personal tragedy," Marshall said. "His father, Chris Boston, is a rock-solid foundation in his life that has kept him disciplined and focused while others around him have strayed from productive paths."

"Since he has been on campus at Mount Tabor High School, James has served as a leader on and off the field. He has earned the ultimate respect of his classmates, teammates, and instructors alike. James is the ultimate competitor. He will undoubtedly succeed at whatever he wishes to put his mind to."

Dartmouth College in New Hampshire is one of the colleges that recruited Antoine, and it's the one he chooses



Antoine

to attend. Although his grades are good, he has to get his scores up on such national tests as the ACT (American College Test) and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test). To do that, he will be attending Phillips Academy in Massachusetts.

After he moved to Forsyth County, Antoine went to Kimberley Park and Old Richmond elementary schools before going on to Mineral Springs Middle School. He started playing football in Pop Warner league. He tried playing basketball along the way but he was a shade too aggressive and had a tendency to foul out. So he decided to stick with football. As much fun as playing football is, Antoine said, he enjoys intellectual pursuits even more.

"I have more fun challenging my mind," he said.

He joked that, rather than being known as James the Football Player, he would like to be known as James the Intellectual King.

He is planning to major in biology with the intention of pursuing some career in the medical field, perhaps as a physical therapist or in sports medicine.

One reason he chose Dartmouth is that it is known for being intellectually rigorous. "I know they will push me, which is what I want," he said.

The Mount Tabor graduation ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, June 6 at Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

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