

/BETHEL PARK

Lang wins Waldie scholarship

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Jenna Lang packed plenty in four years at Bethel Park High School.

She ran. She excelled in academics. She cheered on the athletics teams. She participated in clubs. Plus, she worked several part-time jobs.

All these activities polished the qualities distinctive to her character. So it wasn't too difficult for the 18-year-old daughter of Jill and Dave Lang to compose a seven-page, 3,075-word essay on the subject.

The submission earned her the Ken Waldie Memorial Scholarship. Lang will put the \$16,000 stipend towards an education at Coastal Carolina University. Lang will major in early childhood education while also running cross country and track for the Chanticleers.

The scholarship honors Waldie, who perished on Sept. 11, 2001. He was a passenger on the first plane that crashed into the World Trade Center. A 1973 BP graduate, Waldie captained the swim team before going on to the Naval Academy where he served four years as class president.

"I think it is really important that we honor him," Lang said. "He had to be very brave to go through something like that. We have had a lot of people die for this country and because of them we live in such a great country."

While Lang had sat on Waldie's memorial bench, located in the foray of the gymnasium, many times during her school days, she was "unfamiliar with his entire legacy" until she pursued the scholarship. The opportunity gave her a new appreciation for his story. It also enabled her to gain some insight into herself.

"While by no means do I compare myself to the many great traits and accomplishments that (Waldie) possessed, I feel I share some similarities," Lang said. "I felt like I could relate to a lot of things he did because he was good at sports and he was hard-working. That's a big trait you need in life or you are not going to get very far.

"Mr. Waldie sets the standard you want to follow, especially being a good and kind person whose face lights up a room with a smile. I want to be someone like that. I want to be known for deeds and not runs."

Initially, Lang made her mark running.

Her career started at age 3, when she entered the Brookline Breeze 5K race with her father, who played football at Brentwood High School. By age 7, she was beating her mother, who was All-West Virginia in cross country twice and was on New Martinsville's state relay unit in high school.

Lang ran cross country at St. Bernard's Elementary School in Mt. Lebanon and raced in Hershey Track Meets until she moved to Bethel Park in fourth grade. After a successful career with the Pacer Track Club,

Lang made significant strides in high school. In fact, she is the only runner in Bethel Park school history to have qualified for the Pennsylvania state championships in cross country, indoor track and field, and outdoor track and field during all four years of high school.

Lang set school standards for the indoor 800- and 1,600-meter runs with times of 2:16 and 5:01. She also was part of the record-setting 4×400 relay unit that included Artemis Conaboy, Lauren Heh and Sadie Orie. Her best individual showings were WPIAL runner-up and PIAA seventh-place medalist in cross country as well as eighth in the state for the indoor 800 meters and WPIAL runner-up in the 800 dash and mile in outdoor track.

“The most exciting moment in my (running) career was breaking the 4×4 school record. It came out of nowhere when we finally got it and put our names in the history books at Bethel Park, but through running, I have experienced many things that have shaped my character. I learned to trust my instincts and my heart and that my compassion and values for others should not be put on hold, not even for a race,” said Lang as she recalled a competition when a fallen runner needed assistance.

A team captain throughout her racing career, Lang demonstrated plenty of passion as she cheered for the Black Hawks at football games and basketball contests. She’s balanced that activity with running since she started competitive cheer at age 6.

“Cheerleading has always been fun and fall was my favorite time of the year but each has its pros and cons,” Lang said.

“Running is painful and hard on you mentally and physically but the pros are you can only get better and when you do well, you feel good about yourself. With cheering, there can be a lot of drama and it can be hard jumping around and screaming in the cold for hours when you have to get up the next day and run a 5K.

“Cheering is more exercise than people think. It’s fun though, cheering on the sidelines in front of the crowd and promoting school spirit.”

Lang also found time to maintain a 4.1 GPA in her advanced placement classes as well as join the National Honor Society while also holding down multiple part-time jobs. Since she was 15, she has labored as a babysitter and as an ice cream scooper at Kelley’s Dari Delite. She also volunteers at Bethel Presbyterian Church and works with children through a variety of programs.

Eighty percent of her wages were deposited into her college fund. Plus, she paid for her own car insurance once she learned how to drive.

“I didn’t like that at all,” she said of her parents’ dictates. “I wanted to buy clothes and other things with the money I earned, but it gave me an appreciation for the value of money, and what you have to do in life to save and pay bills.

“Through work, I also learned how to treat people in a kind, positive way,” she added. “So working does build character.

One hundred percent of her experiences, particularly her volunteer activities, prepared her for her career.

“That has given me confirmation for what I am going to do in college,” she concurred.

For Lang, sports as well as career choices by family members confirmed life’s greatest lesson.

Her father is a police officer. When he began his career, he was based in Fairfax, Virginia and he observed the smoke coming from the Pentagon, which was also struck on 9/11. Her brother, Jake, enlisted in the United States Marine Corps upon graduation from Bethel Park in 2022. Deployed in the Middle East, his unit arrived on the USS New York, which was made of steel from the World Trade Center.

“My dad, brother, people like Mr. Waldie and first responders put their lives on the line every day,” said Lang, who even tries to do her part by volunteering at the 9-11 Hero’s Run in North Park and with the Pittsburgh Police Mounted Patrol Unit.

“They never know what will happen and we don’t either. So you have to live life to the fullest. That’s one thing I have learned also through sports. Enjoy it. Sports are very stressful but there is more to life than just racing. There are going to be more stressful things to deal with. So don’t sweat the small stuff.

“There is always going to be stress and pressure to perform well. It’s how you manage, accept and deal with it that matters. Even if it’s hard, it will determine your success.”

Scholarship preserves Waldie legacy

The Ken Waldie Memorial Fund, Inc was established by the Friends of Waldie Organization as a tribute to the Bethel Park High School graduate, who was tragically killed Sept. 11, 2001.

The group consists of classmates Steve McGinnis, Frank DelPercio, Terry Crump and Tom Etzel,

To date, Waldie’s classmates have awarded 23 Bethel Park High School students more than \$160,000 to distinguished seniors for their college pursuits. Additionally, they have contributed to The Almanac’s Waldie/Shaeffer Scholarship Award from 2002-2017. There have been 15 Almanac winners.

The fund and scholarship will end after the award’s 25th year.

Waldie, who was a passenger on American Airlines Flight 11 that struck the first World Trade Center Tower, was a swimmer in high school and at the United States Naval Academy.

After fulfilling his five-year military commitment, Waldie used his mathematics degree to gain employment with Raytheon Corporation. While working, he earned a masters degree and graduated first in his class.

Forty-six at the time of his death, Waldie left behind a wife, Carol, three sons, Andrew, Jeffrey and Jonathan, and a daughter, Meredith, along with a brother, Jack, and three sisters, Jane, Mary Louise and Grace.

Visit: www.forukenny.com for more information on the scholarship or to submit an application for next year's award.

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