

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE
HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS



NEWS RELEASE

Minnesota Performing Arts Student Selected as National Recipient of NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 13, 2017) — **Josephine (Josie) Ross** of St. Louis Park (Minnesota) Benilde-St. Margaret’s High School has been selected the 2017 national recipient of the “National High School Heart of the Arts Award” by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS).

The National High School Heart of the Arts Award was created by the NFHS to recognize those individuals who exemplify the ideals of the positive heart of the arts that represent the core mission of education-based activities. This is the fourth year that the National High School Heart of the Arts Award has been offered.

In addition to her exemplary 3.96 grade-point average and membership in the National Honor Society, Ross has been involved in many activities and clubs.

Ross has participated in numerous performing arts activities, including debate, speech and choir. Among her many awards in this area are the Minnesota State High School League ExCEL Award and the Benilde-St. Margaret’s School Outstanding Character Award.

However, it is the realm of theatre that could accurately be described as her true passion.

Among her theatre accomplishments, she’s a four-year cast member of the One-Act Play, a performer in multiple school musicals and plays, and has received several Hennepin Theatre Trust Spotlight Theatre Awards.

While those experiences and recognitions are significant, her unyielding desire to selflessly help others and to fight for their causes has been extraordinary. Following are three examples of Ross’ desire to help others.

Several years ago, Ross met Rachel Olson when they were cast in the Chaska Valley Family Theatre's (CVFT) production of "Sound of Music."

Olson's parents – Chuck and Debra Olson – were born with hearing, but each lost their hearing as young children. While they always attended Rachel's performances, they were never able to fully enjoy them due to their hearing disabilities.

When Rachel performed in the CVFT's production of "Seussical, the Musical," Ross arranged for an American Sign Language interpreter to sign for the audience, thereby enabling Olson's parents to truly enjoy their daughter's theatre performance.

Tragically, Chuck Olson died shortly thereafter following a long struggle with cancer. "Seussical" was the last show he attended.

In another setting, Ross sought to help individuals who were being bullied.

During her freshman year, Ross read a news story about seventh-grader Jake Ross (no relation) of Forest Lake (Minnesota) High School who was bullied at school.

A year later, as Josie thought about the CVFT's upcoming "Shrek: The Musical" from her position of co-director with her father, Randy, it occurred to her that the show's theme was partially about being bullied. That caused her to wonder if they could produce a show for elementary-aged kids that would not only entertain them, but would also raise their awareness of bullying.

With those thoughts in mind, the CVFT put on a special show on March 4, 2015 for elementary-aged kids from Minnetonka and District 112 elementary schools in which they also invited Jake.

Before the show, Jake was introduced to the students and was presented a Certificate of Appreciation by CVFT Board of Directors President Bill Coldwell.

After the show, Jake offered the students several tips on what they could do if they experienced bullying or if they observed another person being bullied. Because of Jake's activism, Minnesota has since enacted an anti-bullying law.

Although a Millennial herself, Ross' third selfless act harkens back to the mid-1960s and the Vietnam War.

As a writer for the school newspaper during her sophomore year, Ross witnessed backlash from several articles that were published in it.

Since that was her first-ever experience dealing with issues surrounding freedom of the press, Ross sought advice and counsel from the student editors. They in turn told her about a First Amendment rights activist named Mary Beth Tinker.

As a 13-year-old growing up in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1965, Tinker and several other students decided to wear black armbands to school to mourn the deceased on both sides of the Vietnam War. The Des Moines School Board attempted to block the students from wearing the armbands. Tinker got suspended from school and her family sued the school board. The case eventually went to the Supreme Court, which ruled in a 1969 landmark decision that students in school do have First Amendment rights.

Since autumn 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of the beginning of Tinker's fight, Ross wanted to bring her to her high school. Six months later, that became a reality as Tinker spent the day speaking to government and journalism classes, and participating in an open panel discussion.

About the Award

In addition to the selection of Josephine Ross as the national award recipient, the NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award Selection Committee chose eight individuals for section awards. Following are the 2017 National High School Heart of the Arts section winners:

Section 1 – Lindsay Daugherty, student, Barrington (Rhode Island) High School

Section 2 – Christian Ellis, student, Woodbridge (Virginia) Senior High School

Section 3 – RaKavius Chambers, student, Opelika (Alabama) High School

Section 4 – Sabrina Kenoun, student, Buffalo Grove (Illinois) High School

Section 5 – Josephine Ross, student, St. Louis Park (Minnesota) Benilde-St. Margaret's High School

Section 6 – The Premont Mighty Cowboy Band and Mariachi Estrella, Premont (Texas) High School

Section 7 – Susan Seep, instructor, Scottsdale (Arizona) Horizon High School

Section 8 – Abby Kellems, student, Corvallis (Oregon) High School

Nominations for this award were generated through NFHS member state associations and reviewed by the NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award Selection Committee composed of

state association staff members. While the national winner will be recognized June 29 at the NFHS Summer Meeting in Providence, Rhode Island, the section winners will be recognized within their respective states and will receive awards before the end of the current school year.

The National High School Spirit of Sport Award was started in 2014. Including this year, four individuals and one band have been chosen national award recipients.

The previous award recipients follow:

2014 – Leia Schwartz, student-athlete/performing arts student, Miami (Florida) Coral Reef High School

2015 – Ethan Gray, performing arts student, Chicago (Illinois) St. Rita of Cascia High School

2016 – Midland City (Alabama) Dale County High School Marching Band and Band Director Sherri Miller

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and fine arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and fine arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,000 high schools and 11 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.8 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; produces publications for high school coaches, officials and athletic directors; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, spirit coaches, speech and debate coaches and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS Web site at www.nfhs.org.

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