

Teen makes big impression at Boys and Girls Club; O'Bryant High senior is its Youth of the Year



By *Gal Tziperman Lotan, Special to the Reporter* | Apr. 28, 2011

Michael Creese, an 18-year-old senior at O'Bryant High School, is not quick to sing his own praises. Despite winning the Boston's Boys and Girls Club Youth of the Year award and moving on to the state-wide competition May 6 at Westfield State University, he's not the bragging type.

"I've never really been in the spotlight," he said. "I'm not the overachieving, worldly wise man. I'm just an everyday person

who tries to make something out of my life."

Creese isn't putting on a humble face for show, as other successful people are sometimes wont to do, his mentors said. He's just down-to-earth. But those who know him have an easier time listing his many accomplishments.

A small sample: Two years ago, after an intensive course in Japanese language and culture, Creese took a two-week immersion trip to Japan to meet locals and sightsee. Last May, he won a \$500 scholarship at a national science fair hosted by the National Council for Science and Environment in Washington, D.C. for a project he did examining air quality in Roxbury. Faced with health concerns and bullying because of his weight, he increased the frequency of his gym visits and lost more than 60 pounds. He also ran a clean, respectful campaign for the presidency of the Keystone Club at the Yawkey Boys and Girls Club – and won.

"I wish more young people were like Michael," said Andrea Swain, executive director of the Yawkey Boys and Girls Club, where Creese has been a member for 10 years. "He realizes that as adversity comes – and we know we're going to have adversity in our lives – it's not the end of the world."

Swain nominated Creese for the Youth of the Year award because of his positive attitude, she said.

After some gang members in the neighborhood attacked him, Creese grew tired of walking to and from the bus stop to pick up his three younger siblings. So he approached Boys and Girls Club staff members and suggested they begin offering a driver's education class. He was the first person in the club to sign up for the course and the first person to get his license, Swain said. He saved enough money for his own car, which he now uses to pick his siblings up from the bus stop.

"Some of those young people who went to the club with him are dead now," she said. "He chose to come to the club every afternoon to stay safe."

Leadership came naturally to Creese from a young age, Swain said. At 13 he was one of the older members of the club's swim team. Before every practice, the younger team members would run around the locker rooms making a ruckus, sometimes falling and injuring themselves.

Swain was well-aware of the problem – her office was right next to the locker rooms. She usually got a male staff member to head into the locker room, tell the kids to settle down, and tend to any minor injuries.

But one day, Swain noticed, the locker rooms were peculiarly quiet. The kids got ready relatively quickly and without incident. She was pleased, but slightly perplexed.

"Michael's in there today," a staff member told her. "He's like command central."

Creese, who is now more than 6 feet tall, was a strong presence even at 13, Swain said.

"He just stepped in and very nicely, not raising his voice, got everyone to follow some order," she said. "It wasn't his role, but he did it. He sort of became the commanding officer."

In that past few months, to prepare for the city-wide Youth of the Year competition, Creese has met with community leaders, including City Councilor Tito Jackson, who said he was very impressed with Creese's accomplishments.

“Michael is, to me, a real life hero in the flesh, a young person who I see as doing what we all would love to do, which is saving the world,” Jackson said. “I look forward to Michael taking my job someday.”

Taking over Jackson’s council seat is not in Creese’s plans quite yet. In the fall he will enroll at the Wentworth Institute of Technology, one of seven colleges he was accepted to, as a biomedical engineering major. Then he plans on going to medical school, he said.

To prepare for the city-wide contest, Creese worked with Chelsie Ouellette, a senior communication studies major at Northeastern University, on his public speaking and presentation skills. Despite his accomplishments, Oulette said, Creese tends to shy away from promoting himself.

“Michael’s done a lot in 18 years. He’s really developed as a leader in the Roxbury community, and he’s really been a role model in the Roxbury Boys and Girls Club,” Ouellette said. “He has a really important story to tell. I’ve been trying to reinforce to him that people need to hear his story.”