

Students Recognized For Overcoming Challenges

By Alex Bahr

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The Loudoun County chapter of the Beat the Odds Program held its fifth annual Scholarship Awards Ceremony Thursday night, celebrating students who have overcome significant adversity, such as poverty, violence, substance abuse and family break ups, to achieve academic and personal success.

Initiated by the Loudoun County Bar Association in conjunction with the Sheriff's Office and other agencies, the program awards scholarships for higher education and vocational training to youths who are or have been clients of the Juvenile and Domestic Court, The Juvenile Services Unit, the Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Substance Abuse, or the Department of Social Services.

Washington Redskins wide receiver James Thrash provided the keynote speech for the ceremony, talking about the many challenges he has overcome in his own life to achieve success as a professional football player. He talked about growing up with an abusive father and transferring high schools four times in his freshman year alone.

Thrash compared overcoming life's challenges with running a sprint race, saying, "In a race, you are never judged on you start. It doesn't even matter what you look like when you're running. The only thing they use to determine the winner is how you finish the race, and I really feel like running a race is very relative to life. We are never remembered for how we start out in life, we are only remembered for how we finish. And I want to pose a question today: how are you going to finish the race? How will your story end?"

[VIDEO CLIP OF JAMES THRASH'S REMARKS]

Jessica Murray, a senior at Loudoun Valley High School and this year's class valedictorian, was awarded the Beat The Odds Scholarship Award for 2009, and plans to attend the College of William and Mary in the fall.

Three Merit Award winners also received scholarships. They are: Marlen Santos of Loudoun Valley High School; Ahsanul Haque of Dominion High School; and Joseph Williams of Dominion High School.

Breon Earle of Broad Run High School received this year's Honorable Mention Award.

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