



Beat the Odds

By JOHN L. GEDDIE Wednesday, 3 June 2009

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James Thrash

There were more than a few special guests at the May 28 ceremony honoring the five scholarship winners in Loudoun's "Beat the Odds" scholarship awards, but none were more special than the award-winners themselves.

Keynote speaker James Thrash of the Washington Redskins provided the keynote address, referring back to his own troubled youth and the times in his younger life when it caused him to act out. The wide receiver told the assembled crowd about growing up in a family with abuse, and how his circumstances led others to tell him that he would "never amount to anything."

Thrash's story took a turn, as he was able to develop his athletic ability to the point where he was able to obtain a college degree and a 12-year career in the NFL. He credited his turnaround to friends and his own determination to beat the odds.

"In a race, you're never judged by how you start," he told the award winners.

This year's honorees have recovered from an array of challenges that might break those of far senior years. Speaking to the assembled crowd, the winners recounted histories of abuse, poverty, broken families, and in one case, the loss of several family members in an auto accident.

Each winner was nominated by a teacher or administrator from their high school, who testified to their resiliency and strength.

This year's "Beat the Odds" Scholarship Award winner is Jessica Murray, a senior at Loudoun Valley High School. The 2009 Valedictorian, she will be attending William & Mary in the fall.

Other winners were:

Marlen Santos Merit Award Winner Loudoun Valley High School

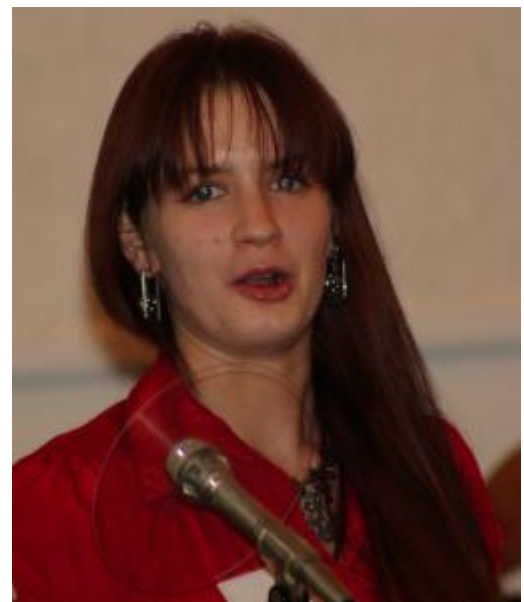
Ahsanul Haque Merit Award Winner Dominion High School

Joseph Williams Merit Award Winner Dominion High School

Breon Earle Honorable Mention Broad Run High School

The award ceremony was attended by U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf and Bob McDonnell, former Virginia Attorney General and candidate for Virginia Governor.

This is the fifth year that Beat the Odds has identified remarkable Loudoun students who have bounced back from extraordinary



Jessica Murray

challenges. The program was initially created by the Loudoun Bar Association. The Loudoun County Sheriff's Office, the Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney, the Office of the Public Defender, Loudoun County Mental Health and Mental Retardation, the Juvenile Court Services Unit and the Department of Family Services also participate.

Over its five years, the "Beat the Odds" program has been able to recognize and provide scholarship funds to 19 students from Loudoun County—several of whom returned to attend this year's awards.



Marlen Santos



Ahsanul Haque



Joseph Williams



Breon Earle

Tags: Ahsanul Haque, Award, Beat the Odds, Bob McDonnell, Breon Earle, Broad Run High School, Dominion High School, Frank Wolf, James Thrash, Jessica Murray, Joseph Williams, Loudoun Bar, Loudoun Valley High School, Marlen Santos, Scholarship

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