



Maritsa Skowronek: Eppler's superhero and film star

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It is easy to find the source of Maritsa Skowronek's superpower.

It's her heart.

"It feels so good to make other people smile," said the Eppler 9th grader. "You can feel it in your heart when you make people happy."

It is this natural kindness and engaging personality that has led to Skowronek being featured in a recent documentary on what is really like for individuals with Down Syndrome and their families.

Called *Chromosomally Enhanced: What's Your Superpower*, the film demonstrates how that the extra chromosome in individuals with Down Syndrome gives them an ability to see the world through rose colored glasses.

The qualities the film celebrates – care, sincerity, empathy – are part of Maritsa's natural DNA.

"Everything that she sees or hears goes right into her heart, and she feels for you and she wants to help you through it," said Maritsa's mother, Athena Skowronek. "She has always been that way. She prays for people and she worries about them. She tries to do the right thing all the time."

In the film, Maritsa is featured telling her story while portraying someone she admires: Rey, from the Star Wars franchise – a character she identifies with through her strength and determination.

Maritsa was also lone female student among nine pulling a 33,000 pound WWII bomber plane called "The Yankee Lady."

"Spending time with Maritsa was a wonderful lesson in just how important those living with Down syndrome are to our world," said the film's director, Keith Famie. "They help remind us all that being kind and caring can and should be the way we all treat each other. Every time we had a chance to film with her the sun just seemed to shine that much brighter. She clearly has superpowers."

The documentary had its premier last month at Emagine theatre in Novi and has been featured on PBS. It is also being considered for international film festivals.

Maritsa said she has received positive feedback on her acting debut from friends and family. She also said she loved the movie and – true to her nature – was touched by the story told by her friends who are part of the Kids on the Go program in St. Clair Shores.

"I was crying when they told their stories – I was so happy and grateful to be part of that," she said.

While she enjoys acting, Maritsa said her true career goal is teaching – a profession her teachers say she is already pursuing in her work with younger students at Eppler.

"She has always been caring, but now that she is the oldest in the class she feels it now," said her teacher, Tammy Gleason. "She knows 'this is my job to help the younger kids and be friendly with them.' "

Athena Skowronek said her love of school and education comes from her Utica Community Schools teachers.

"They are such a great role model for her," she said. "That is really who helps our kids become who they are...it's the teachers in the classroom."

The film can be viewed at:

<https://chromosomallyenhancedwhatsyoursuperpower.vhx.tv/>

More information on the film can be found at: <https://whatsyoursuperpowerfilm.com/>

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