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Local News

Meet Eppler's newest superhero and film star



Maritsa Skowronek, a ninth-grader at Eppler Junior High School in Utica is one of several students featured in “Chromosomally Enhanced: What’s Your Superpower,” a documentary by Keith Famie. Photo courtesy of UCS

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October 25, 2022 at 7:42 a.m.

Metropolis has Superman.

The Army has Captain America.

Utica has Eppler Junior High School’s Maritsa Skowronek.

As for the source of her superpower, that’s easy.

It’s her heart.

“It feels so good to make other people smile,” Skowronek said, in a news release. “You can feel it in your heart when you make people happy.”

It is this natural kindness and engaging personality that led the ninth-grader to be featured in a recent documentary on what is really like for individuals with Down Syndrome and their families.

The film titled, “[Chromosomally Enhanced: What’s Your Superpower](#),” demonstrates how 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 such as care, sincerity, empathy are all part of Skowronek’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, Skowronek 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.

Among the highlights are the superkids showing off their strength including Skowronek, the lone female student among nine students 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 premiere at Emagine Novi and has been featured on PBS. It also won an award at the Grand Rapids Film Festival and is being considered for international film festivals as well.

Skowronek 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.



Maritsa Skowronek poses with filmmaker Keith Famie during the premiere.

While she enjoys acting, Skowronek 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 daughter’s 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/>

For more information visit <https://whatisyoursuperpowerfilm.com/>