

Ballston Spa teens compete in 'Survivor' style challenge

Raising money for teens in need

By Wendy Liberatore – Times Union - Published 9:45 pm, Thursday, March 9, 2017



Students Miranda Blaauboer, left, and Abbie Laine participate in Ballston Spa High School's Warrior Project on March 7, 2017, in Ballston Spa, N.Y. (Skip Dickstein/Times Union)

Ballston Spa High School seniors Abbie Laine and Miranda Blaauboer have had a taste of hunger. Last year, they spent three days eating only plain white rice, two cups per day. "We could drink as much water as we wanted," Blaauboer said. "But it was hard, especially during lacrosse season."

The teens deprived themselves as a part of a national team of students who are competing in a series of "Survivor"-style challenges. Known as Cheer 4 Your Life Warriors, the students, along with a group of 19 others at the school, are raising money to help ill or needy teens pursue their dreams. At the same time, students are building their own characters by stretching themselves physically and socially in 20 or more service-oriented tasks over four months.

"It's about doing something you wouldn't normally do," Blaauboer said. "It's about getting out of your comfort zone."

This is their second year as Warriors. Last year's challenges included sleeping outside for two nights in March to learn about homelessness. They helped a custodian clean the school cafeteria after lunch, volunteered at a nursing home and assisted elementary school teachers on a field day.

Missy Payne, a former contestant on the CBS reality show "Survivor," established Cheer 4 Your Life as a fun way for teens to offer emotional and financial support to their peers.

"It's all about kids helping kids," Payne said. "That's what makes it unique and super cool. But I would never ask the students to do anything I wouldn't do."

Ballston Spa got involved in the inaugural year with senior Stephan Washburn, who needed a project to complete his International Baccalaureate degree. "We did it to help out Stephan," Laine said. " ... We knew we were helping people and wanted to keep it going."

Those who finish enough challenges and raise \$400 will have the chance to go to Dallas in August. There, they will meet those they are helping — teens like Tanner Aspen, an aspiring downhill ski racer whose family couldn't afford his equipment, and singer Erica Burkett who, with help from the Warriors, is getting an opportunity to record.

The Dallas visit also includes navigating an extreme obstacle course that Payne calls a mashup of "Survivor" and "American Ninja Warrior." The students divide into teams that include "Survivor" contestants and the fundraiser's recipients.

To bolster enthusiasm, Payne will visit every school that is involved, including Ballston Spa on April 11. And like a reality TV show, there will be a plot twist:

"When I come, I will have a whole new announcement," she said. "I can't reveal it now." Payne said Laime and Blaauboer are inspirational because they are doing the challenge again and galvanizing other students. Their energy will keep Cheer For Your Life going in the school beyond their graduation.

"Ballston Spa has some of the greatest, most motivated kids," Payne said. "They give the program enormous support and I want to give it back to them."

More Information

How to help

To donate to Laime's or Blaauboer's Warrior Project, visit <http://warriors2by2.com>. Click on "shelter" and then "our Warriors"

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