

Don't Stop *Believin'*

Sometimes, life just isn't fair. However, there are times that even as high school students, we have the power to make a change. Over the past year, Richland R-1 students and staff have had the opportunity to do just that.

In November 2016, while on a trip to Washington, D.C. to receive the National Blue Ribbon Schools award, eight Richland students had the honor of meeting an American hero. Paige Pinkley and Aaron Wells, along with the other students and staff, were at the Arlington National Cemetery waiting in line for their shuttle bus when they noticed something unusual: an army veteran missing both of her legs was standing at the very back of the line. Her name was Christy Gardner and by her side was her service dog, a golden retriever named Moxie. The students and staff wanted to give back to an army veteran that had already given so much for our freedom, so they introduced themselves to her and let her move in front of them in line. "Being able to give back with such a simple gesture meant more to us than we will ever know, and that simple gesture created a spark in our small school of Richland," said junior Paige Pinkley. A month later, Richland Superintendent Frank Killian saw a familiar face while watching ESPN. "I saw a story about Christy, Moxie, and sled hockey," said Killian. "That is when I found out that Christy had Moxie to help her with seizures due to the severe brain trauma she received while serving her country, whereas before I thought Moxie was just to help her walk. I then asked Mr. Arnold (one of the high school history teachers) to track her down on Facebook, which he did. I then started chatting with Christy about the possibility of coming to Richland for Veterans Day."

The Veterans Day committee was on board with the decision, and on November 11, Christy was flown down to Richland from her home in Maine to be the guest speaker at the ceremony. Gardner talked about her recovery process and how she came out of her



After her speech during the Veteran's Day assembly, Christy Gardner takes off her prosthetic leg and shows Richland Superintendent Frank Killian. Gardner was injured in action with the US military, but eventually chose to have her legs taken off because of the trouble they gave her after the injury.

● Lead Story



US women's sled hockey player Christy Gardner sits on the ice and changes from her "legs" to her sled as her service dog Moxie watches over her.

injury as an even stronger person than before. During her laid-back address to the crowd, Gardner wore her USA hockey jersey while her service dog Moxie enjoyed a peaceful nap and had the full attention of every student and staff member at the school. After Gardner's departure, the yearbook staff decided to take a closer look into her story.

As they researched her sled hockey team, they discovered something shocking: Unlike the men's sled hockey team, the US women's team is not fully funded by USA Hockey. Furthermore, women's sled hockey is not yet recognized as a Paralympic sport by the International Olympic Committee. The yearbook staff decided that they wanted to do something to help these amazing women. After an email conversation with team manager Tom Koester, the staff learned the team would be playing in a tournament in St. Louis at the Lindenwood Ice Arena on January 26-28, and a plan began to form. The women were attending the tournament to help prepare themselves for the World Cup in the Czech Republic, but they also wanted to use it as an outlet to raise awareness and spread the word about their team. Koester explained that the team was in need of a new website, so Richland yearbook advisor, Kyle Carter, and his staff came up with an idea: prior to attending the tournament, seven Richland students would team up with other schools around the St. Louis area to make a media group of 35 students. These students would work together to build a new website for the team, along with shooting and editing videos, action photos, and portraits of the team members (including Moxie) to add to the site. They would also write short biographies of each player to include next to the portraits.

"I was a little bit intimidated when I first heard about the project because I had never even seen sled hockey before, so I had no idea what I was doing. However, once I saw the game, I picked it up immediately," said sophomore Allison Jones. Now that the staff had an objective, it was time to assemble their team. Richland's team consisted of the six members of the yearbook staff, along with Richland's resident student website designer, Aaron Wells. Liza King was named the general manager for the weekend, so she and Carter continued to search for additional students to work on the project. "We wanted schools that were good in a particular area. We even had specific students that we wanted. Emily Hood, Michael Mellinger, and

Aaron Demarco were a select few that we knew would be up to the task. Then, the other advisors recommended students that they thought would be good for the job," said Carter. The team consisted of students from Richland, Kirkwood, Clayton, Francis Howell North, and Francis Howell Central high schools. Friday morning, Carter and the seven Richland students headed St. Louis to begin the process. They visited Kirkwood and Clayton to meet with other members of the team and then to the rink. "We went to the rink early because we wanted to get a feel for the facility that we would be spending the next couple of days in. The Rebel spirit in us wanted to ice skate, and the manager of the ice rink was nice enough to let us give it a try. Although none of us had ever ice skated before, we took the opportunity that we were given and ran with it. The experience was like nothing before, and I know that we all had a blast even though most of us became really close friends with the ice," said GM King. Soon after this, the other team members began filling in to the rink. Once everyone had arrived, a meeting was held to discuss the plans and everyone's roles for the weekend. This meeting was also held so that every team member would have the opportunity to interact with one another before the hard work began. Finally, the first game of the night was underway. Nine photographers were assigned positions in the rink, and videographers filmed from various specified points of the arena. Aaron Demarco, a Kirkwood junior and the overall video editor, also brought his drone and filmed video with it for a



different perspective of the rink and players. Demarco said, "I didn't think sled hockey was a sport, so hearing that this was a real thing was crazy. Kelsey DiClaudio said, 'I want people to hit me.' They can't walk, so you'd think they might be a little fragile, but hearing 'Run into me, I'm going to push you back,' is kind of exciting. Hearing how it impacted their lives was definitely a major takeaway from the weekend because I was able to come back and tell people, 'They actually play sled hockey.' That was probably the most exciting part," added Demarco.

Friday night after the game, the students assembled into five interview teams, and they began interviewing the players and the coaches. The interviewing process was an enlightening experience for both the players and the students. "I actually do a lot of speaking engagements, and honestly I feel like the students were very professional and very prepared," said hockey defensive player Monica Quimby. "If a question came up, they were able to troubleshoot and do it with a smile on their faces. They are so professional at such a young age, and they are really getting that experience that will help them in the future. The students did an incredible job and should be very proud. I have two kids of my own, and I hope they are able to have a hands-on experience like this when they get into high school," Quimby added.

Saturday morning, before the games started, the photographers headed to the rink once again to take portraits of each player. The photographers and video producers stayed at the rink, while Editor Kate Wyman took her team of website designers and photography editors to the war room: the journalism classroom at Clayton High School.

While there, the photo editors received every photo and video that was taken and edited them as the website designers took that content and applied it to the website.

"When we first arrived, none of us really knew what we were doing. However,



Veterans in attendance at Richland's Veterans Day along with Christy Gardner and her service dog Moxie. Gardner flew in from her home in Maine for the event.



With a look of impending doom, sophomore Allison Jones (above) prepares to take a tumble while junior Liza King attempts to skate through Jones' legs during some downtime for the coverage team from Richland. In total, seven students from Richland participated in the coverage of the US Women's Sled Hockey team while they visited St. Louis. More than 40 students from Richland JH/HS got to watch and visit with the players however, as on Saturday the school sponsored a field trip up to the Lindenwood Ice Arena to watch the team play. Students made signs and cheered on their heroes as they participated in the contests.



we all united to form a plan of action and get the website done. Even though we only had 48 hours, we were able to make an amazing website that defied all of our expectations. I am beyond proud of our team. We all got along so well that you would have thought we had known each other for years. We started out as strangers, but we left as lifelong friends," said Wyman.

Sunday night, when the website was near completion, the excitement was palpable as the remaining students, mainly from Kirkwood and Richland, came up with last-minute ideas and finishing touches to add to the site. Finally, the website was completed and it was time to show off the work. Mr. Killian navigated through the newly-built website and after a few minutes of laughter and cheers, the remaining team members headed home, all of them ready to do another project like this again in the future. The new site can be viewed at <http://uswomensledgehockey.org/>.

On May 5, the team received news that they are now going to be included under USA Hockey's umbrella, meaning they will receive sponsorship and training perks, like the men's Paralympics team. This came just hours before the team won a gold medal by defeating Canada 1-0 in Ostrava, Czech Republic in the second Women's International Para Ice Hockey Cup.