Proud father and son: Alex and Congressman Pete Sessions

Alex the achiever: With Gladys Knight at the Be Beautiful Be Yourself Gala...

a winning session

FOR A CHILD BORN WITH DOWN SYNDROME, EVERY DAY CAN BE A STRUGGLE. BUT CONGRESSMAN **PETE SESSIONS**, HIS SON ALEX, AND MANY OTHERS HAVE FOUND THE STRENGTH TO SUCCEED.

> "'Alex, what's the word?' Without hesitation he replies with one simple word: 'Can!'"

"Since the day he was born, I have always encouraged my son Alex to focus on his many abilities rather than his challenges. When he is faced with a difficult task, I ask him the same question I have asked since he was a little boy. 'Alex, what's the word?' Without hesitation he replies with one simple word: 'Can!'

Alex's mother and I knew early on that despite having Down syndrome, Alex has many talents, particularly in athletics. The nicknames he received while competing in the Special Olympics were very fitting—in track he is known as 'Dash,' and in swimming, 'Splash.' Regardless of the size or ability of his competitors, Alex's vigorous desire to succeed has enabled him to become an accomplished athlete and the recipient of several Special Olympics medals.

Of course, Alex's passion is evident not just on his chosen field of play. He loves to give the prayer before each meal, so much so that we started calling him 'Reverend Sessions.' In school Alex formed a lasting, 12-year relationship with his loving kindergarten teacher, Janet Cundiff, and she became an integral part of the caring cadre of people that further challenged Alex to build upon his strengths. He has become the exceptionally fine young man he is today, at the age of 18, due to his overall passion for life, the service of others, and his hard work in school.

One of my proudest moments was when Alex was able to join his older brother, his grandfather, and me in earning the prestigious Eagle Scout Badge. For his extensive community service project to earn the honor, Alex teamed with a friend to refurbish the personalized wooden markers placed around White Rock Lake Park in our neighborhood in Dallas. He spent countless hours washing, sanding, and varnishing the weathered markers until they looked as good as new. When the Eagle Scout Badge was added to his uniform, I was reminded yet again of how much Alex is able to do.

Last year Alex and I shared center stage here in Washington for the inaugural Global Down Syndrome Foundation's Be Beautiful Be Yourself Gala and Fashion Show. During the night, it became abundantly clear to me that it is not just the people who have surrounded Alex throughout his life who are committed to his simple declaration. The 400 people in the audience, including professional athletes, philanthropists, TV personalities, and public officials, all resounded with their dedication to the word 'can.' But despite the presence of these boldfacers, the children and young adults with Down syndrome were the stars of the show.

The night was a wonderful opportunity for others to gain a better understanding of the Down syndrome community, as well as of the challenges we deal with to ensure that all people with intellectual disabilities have the ability to reach their full potential. The real highlight of the evening for me, however, was watching my son receive the foundation's Ambassador Award, for self-advocates. I believe Alex will motivate others to get involved in the cause, just like he was my inspiration to become an active advocate of the Down syndrome community in Congress.

In 2008, I joined Representatives Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Patrick Kennedy, and Eleanor Holmes Norton in forming the Congressional Down Syndrome Caucus to educate Members of Congress and their staff about Down syndrome. Additionally, our goal is to promote research and public policies that would enhance the quality of life for individuals with Down syndrome. One legislative initiative the Caucus is advocating for this Congress is the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. The ABLE Act would ease many financial strains that families face by allowing them to create tax-free savings accounts to cover expenses such as education, housing, and transportation for their loved ones with intellectual disabilities. As I continue my work in Congress on behalf of this cause, there is no one else I would rather partner with than Alex. I look forward to continuing my efforts for further research to ensure that all young people with Down syndrome have a brighter future. Alex is truly a wonderful role model, and I remain confident that there will be many more occasions in his life where he will proudly declare that he indeed can achieve his goals." **CF**

... and receiving his Eagle Scout Badge

PHOTOGRAPH BY: JAKE DEAN (SESSIONS AND SON)

INSIGHT

The Global Down Syndrome Foundation is dedicated to improving the lives of people with Down syndrome through research, medical care, education, and outreach. The foundation supports the Linda Crnic Institute for Down Syndrome, the first academic home in the US dedicated to eradicating the medical and cognitive ill effects associated with the condition as well as the Crnic Institute's Sie Center for Down Syndrome, the largest medical care clinic for people with Down syndrome in the nation. It is the leader in bringing awareness to funding inequalities and in advocating to increase funding in the areas of research and medical care for people with Down syndrome. *303-468-6667; globaldownsyndrome.org*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Down syndrome is a chromosomal condition whereby a child is born with three copies of chromosome 21 instead of two.
- Down syndrome is the most frequent chromosomal disorder, representing an estimated 400,000 Americans.
- The lifespan of a person with Down syndrome in the 1980s was 28 years; today it is 60 years.
- The IQ of a person with Down syndrome has increased approximately 20 points over the past 15 years.

Charity Register

A CAUSE TO CELEBRATE: CHARITIES COMMEMORATING SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

CAPITAL CARING

The Cause: Providing hospice care, palliative care, and counseling to DC families, including afterhours call centers for 24-hour guidance in caring for family members with advanced illnesses.

Celebration: Capital Caring has been supporting tens of thousands of families dealing with long-term illness—financially, emotionally, and spiritually—for nearly 35 years.

President and CEO: Malene Smith Davis

How to Help: Volunteer or donate. *2900 Telestar Ct., Falls Church, VA, 703-538-2065; capitalcaring.org*

LEUKEMIA & LYMPHOMA SOCIETY

The Cause: The world's largest voluntary health agency dedicated to blood cancer, funding research and resources to cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's Disease, and myeloma.

Celebration: It has been more than 35 years since LLS affiliate Robert C. Gallo, MD, a pioneer in AIDS virus discovery and research, built a foundation for the use of synthetic IL-2 for lymphoma treatment.

President and CEO: John Walter

How to Help: Become a volunteer, donate, or participate in national events. *1311 Mamaroneck Ave., Ste. 310, White Plains, NY, 914-949-5213; lls.org*

NATIONAL HOSPICE FOUNDATION

The Cause: In partnership with the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, funding research and providing the highest quality comfort for those living with serious and terminal illness.

Celebration: The NHF has been caring for long-term patients and providing support for families for 20 years.

President: J. Donald Schumacher, PsyD

How to Help: The NHF's annual gala, Celebrating the Women of Hospice: A Salute to Heroines and Humanitarians, will be held on March 30. *Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center, 201 Waterfront St., National Harbor, 703-837-3149; nationalhospicefoundation.org*

WASHINGTON HUMANE SOCIETY

The Cause: The congressionally chartered animal welfare agency provides neutering services, safe haven for homeless animals, and adoption services.

Celebration: Last year marked the 10th anniversary of the society's successful fight to make animal cruelty a felony.

President and CEO: Lisa LaFontaine

How to Help: Provide a foster home for animals or volunteer at the shelter. *1201 New York Ave. NE, 202-576-6664; washhumane.org*