

In Portsmouth: A film director on wheels

PHS student with rare neuromuscular disorder takes second in national documentary film competition



Ellary Kinnane with her mom, Cindy, at Portsmouth High School. Ellary, who has NemaLine Myopathy, recently took second place in the documentary category of a national student film contest.

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“

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ELLARY KINNANE, ON VOLT HOCKEY

VOLT HOCKEY LEAGUE LOOKING FOR MORE PLAYERS

Volt hockey, offered in partnership with the Hockomock Area YMCA in North Attleboro, Mass., enables people with upper and lower body weaknesses play a sport while being a part of a community — and give their parents, friends and caregivers a great reason to cheer them on from the stands.

The adaptive sport is for people who have different physical abilities, such as spinal cord injuries, spinal muscular atrophy, Duchenne muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, amputations, etc.

Volt hockey is an organized and competitive sport where players use specialized power wheelchairs to maneuver a ball into a net to score goals. The chairs can be customized to adapt to an individual's needs to offer additional physical support.

The local team, the Rolling Warriors, practice from 3-5 p.m. on Saturdays at the Hockomock Area YMCA, 300 Elmwood St., North Attleboro, Mass. The league serves players in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

If you or someone you know would be interested in playing, visit space2thrive.org to learn more.

By Jim McGaw

PORTSMOUTH — Ellary Kinnane cannot eat, breathe or walk on her own, but that hasn't stopped her from becoming a nationally recognized young filmmaker.

Ellary, a 17-year-old student at Portsmouth High School, lives with Nemaline Myopathy, a rare neuromuscular disorder that causes muscle weakness of varying severity throughout her body. She is wheelchair-bound, and uses a ventilator day and night to allow her to breathe.

Despite facing numerous challenges, Ellary recently achieved a remarkable second-place finish in the documentary film category at the Student Television Network's national competition. The achievement is all the more impressive when you consider her competition: more than 2,000 other high school students, regardless of their physical abilities.

"She missed first place by three points," said Ryan Bailey, Ellary's teacher in The Academy for Media Communications and Digital Video Production, a CTE program at PHS. His CTE has nearly 40 students and is looking to nearly double that number next year. "A little less than half" of the students enrolled are coming from outside Portsmouth, he said.

Bailey was so impressed with Ellary's film, in fact, that he was confident she was going to win it all. "It was something that was out of her control completely," he gave as the reason for her runner-up status. "Her cinematography was the best, I thought. She did get a plaque and a medal though."

So what's her film about?

"I had an assignment to do a video for a documentary and I chose Volt hockey, because it's something people haven't heard about," Ellary said in an interview recently at PHS. "Volt hockey is an adaptive sport for people who have upper and lower body weaknesses."

Ellary participates in the para-sport herself at a league run by a group called [Space2Thrive](#) out of the Hockomock Area YMCA in North Attleboro, Mass., where she did much of her filming. The sport is played in specialty motorized chairs, bringing the game of floor hockey to a population that would not otherwise have access to team sports.

The special wheelchairs have cross-shaped paddles mounted directly at the tip of the chair, which players use to maneuver a plastic ball into the goal or to a teammate. "They go 10 mph and they're very responsive. They're more jerky," Ellary said of her playing wheelchair, which carries her ventilator on the back.

"It's supposed to be a non-contact sport so when you run into someone, that's a foul," said Ellary, who's broken a paddle before and has seen other players do the same.

Full independence

She loves the sport, however, because of the independence it affords.

“This is the only sport that I can play by myself,” said Ellary, who used to participate in Challenger baseball but needed help hitting the ball.

Cindy Kinnane, Ellary’s mom, said there’s another reason why Volt hockey is so special. “The sense of community it brings for the people who play is great,” she said, adding the league has opened a door to people who could not otherwise play a team sport due to their disability.

Filmmaking and hockey is important to Ellary, but there are plenty of other activities that keep her busy, too.

“I like to sing, and playing the violin. I have a setup on my chair,” said Ellary, who’s also a music-lover and a member of the school’s Green Club, Mock Trial Team, Community Service Club, and Film Honor Society. She’s also looking to land a summer internship or job.

POV shots featured

To film her documentary, “Volt Hockey: The Story Behind the Rolling Warriors,” Ellary used one of the CTE program’s better Sony digital cameras. (Bailey said his program has since acquired upgraded equipment.)

Ellary shot interviews with fellow players and their parents, including North Attleboro program founder Helena Liedtke, whose daughter Vivienne was born with spinal muscular atrophy. Her husband, Helge Liedtke, is a coach who founded Space2Thrive along with Helena.

Helena learned about Volt hockey when she went searching for physical activities for Vivienne, who is one of the players — and coaches — featured in the film.

“It was really cool playing a team sport independently,” Vivienne says in the film, echoing Ellary’s earlier comment.

Ellary’s father, Craig Kinnane, is also interviewed. “I love watching her play. I can see her strategizing as she’s playing. I think it’s fantastic for her to be able to ... experience the camaraderie with her teammates,” he said.



Ellary Kinnane, with a Sony camera in her lap, demonstrating how she filmed the action sequences while playing Volt hockey.

Ellary also captured Volt hockey's action by placing the camera at lap level while she raced around the court, giving viewers a unique POV experience.

The documentary was limited to 15 minutes, so a lot of footage was left on the cutting room floor. "I did a 40-minute interview for the film," she said, adding the post-production editing job was challenging. "I had to cut some parts out."

Ellary enjoyed the editing process, however, as well as all the research and preparation that went into the assignment, which was due Jan. 31.

Other students competed, too

"This is becoming a popular form of media," Bailey said of the documentary format, so he entered Ellary's film — along with 13 others from CTE students — in the **Student Television Network's** (STN) national competition.

"There were 53,000 students competing," Bailey said, noting that more than 2,000 of them were documentaries. One day Bailey got a message on his phone: Ellary took second place in the documentary category. He quickly texted her.

"I was watching the Oscars," said Ellary, adding she didn't quite understand the magnitude of her accomplishment at first. "I didn't even know it was national."

Several other PHS students won honorable mentions during STN's convention held earlier this month in Tampa Bay, Fla.:

- Luke West and Alex Mitchell: "**Setting Sail with Bill's Boats**"
- Nila Khoury and Nehuel Armentanzas: "**History of the Newport Car Museum**"
- Owen Hay: "**Exploring E-Waste**"
- Juno Adams: "Level Up! — eSports in Schools"

All of those films, and more from the CTE program, are available for viewing at the **WPHSLIVE YouTube channel**.

Bailey said he's also organizing a PHS film festival from 6-8 p.m. on Friday, April 25, at Portsmouth Middle School, where these and other films will be screened.