

## VOICES

## THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

## Students honored for ACE work

**B**ob Costas of sports-announcing fame delivered a powerful message last week to a group of middle and high school students who are “unsung heroes” based on the description of the award they got. Most people know Costas because they tune in to the Olympics every four years or watch games for which he is the announcer.

Costas, one of the most decorated sports broadcasters of all times and the winner of 25 Emmy Awards, told the students being honored at last week’s Coaches for Character’s annual Advocates for Character and Education Awards (ACE Awards) of a young life that could have gone another way. His father was a gambler and routinely bet on various ball-games.

There were, as Costas described, hot and cold streaks, hardships and windfalls. The young Costas was given the role of sitting in the family car, checking the scores and bringing updates to his father, according to a *Greenville News* story by Nathaniel Cary.

Those experiences of hearing faraway voices, surely soothing ones, traveling through radio waves captured Costas’ imagination. He developed a love for sports and for broadcasting. His father died at the age of 42 from a heart attack, but the young Costas’ life had been changed for the better.

“If I didn’t have something beyond the narrow limits of my own youthful existence, if I didn’t have something beyond what the world was then telling me what I was capable of, then I might not have wound up being as fortunate as I wound up being,” Costas told the students.

Some remarkable students pass through the 33 middle and high schools in Greenville County each year, but most of them never enjoy accolades for catch-



Sports broadcaster Bob Costas spoke during the 2014 ACE awards held at Redemption World Outreach in Greenville. PATRICK COLLARD/STAFF

ing the winning touchdown or being the school valedictorian. These students often persevere despite overwhelming problems, and they make a mark in their own quiet and often overlooked way.

These students are truly “unsung heroes” to use the term often used by Greg Blatt to describe the students who have been honored with ACE Awards. Blatt is founder and executive director of Coaches 4 Character, and last year ago his organization started the ACE Awards in partnership with Greenville County Schools.

“These are young people that do amazing things but never have been thanked or applauded for it,” he said when announcing the creation of the awards. “Everybody needs hope to succeed and inspiration to keeping plugging along.”

Profiles of the 66 annual recipients have been published for the past two years in *The Greenville News* and on GreenvilleOnline.com. The awards have gone to one boy and one girl from each of Greenville County’s public middle and high schools. Nominations come from teachers, parents, church leaders and community partners.

Last year the school counselors at Berea Middle (Lynn Ed-

wards) and Blue Ridge High School (Jessica Fevrin) described what the awards were all about. “This award is not a popularity contest, and does not focus on the highest GPA or an athletic accomplishment,” they wrote at the time in a *Greenville News* op-ed.

“Many of the nominees have participated in community service and volunteer activities. Some of the nominees have overcome personal challenges in their young lives and strive to excel, even when the odds are against them,” they wrote.

Here are snippets from just a few of the stories recently published in the newspaper:

» Scott Johnson is from Mauldin High School. His mother worked two to three jobs to provide for the family. He has taken care of his younger brother during that time, and is a member of FBLA and Interact, is very involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, and for six years has mentored at-risk Greenville teens through an outrisk ministry at his church.

» Jadisja Jones of Bryson Middle School was diagnosed with respiratory arthritis at an early age. That didn’t stop her and she has participated in gymnastics and tumbling. She is one of the organizers of Bryson Up Standers Club.

» James Zachary Snyder of Berea High School credits music with helping him be where he is today. He went through the Bridges to a Brighter Future program and Youth Leadership Greenville. He joined Berea High Marching Band in the seventh grade and has served as brass captain, horn line captain, co-drum major and band captain.

Sixty-three other middle and high school students have equally impressive records. It is wonderful to see their hard work and accomplishments recognized.