

## Area youths receive Luke Stone Illumination Merit Awards

By Clint Thomas Metro staff Jun 27, 2022



Dowdy



Loftis

The Luke Stone Illumination Fund recently presented 2022 Merit Awards to a pair of area teenagers, to recognize their perseverance through adversity and assist them financially.

Bryson Dowdy, a ninth grade student at John Adams Middle School, was one of the two, local award recipients. Since he was a young child, the Charleston resident has worked toward expanding accessibility and opportunities to other wheelchair users.

Dowdy was the first seated athlete for a middle and high school in the state of West Virginia, and he is active in track, karate, basketball, and sled hockey.

“In 2015, Dowdy decided he would like to play sled hockey,” his grandmother, Linda Streets, explained in an email. “The only problem was, there was no sled hockey team in his area.”

Dowdy convinced his grandparents to start a sled hockey team, and he is now a rostered member of the Charleston Thunder Sled Hockey team, which plays at the South Charleston Memorial Ice Areana. He is also a member of the Cincinnati Icebreakers junior and adult travel teams.

“Bryson has been instrumental in establishing funds for the local sled hockey team, which currently has 13 adaptive players;” his grandmother said. “Because of Bryson’s ingenuity, the participation is free to the players.”

In addition to sled hockey involvement, Dowdy participates regularly in SK races for charity. He has volunteered his time to help others through his church and the local Ronald McDonald House. He currently serves on the Youth Council for the Charleston City Council.

In 2017, he was named the Steve P. Prefonataine Most Courageous Runner for the Charleston Distance Run, SK portion.

Two years later, he was selected by the Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation to be the Dick's Sporting Goods Junior Starter of the game. He skated on the ice with the Pittsburgh players for the national anthem prior to their Oct. 10, 2019, NHL game against the Anaheim Ducks in Pittsburgh.

Dowdy has been featured in magazines, newspapers, and a video called "I am an Athlete" by the I'm An Athlete Foundation. He is also a correspondent for the Charleston Gazette-Mail's teen-oriented "FlipSide" publication.

"Bryson aspires to always be involved in advancing adaptive sports opportunities. He has already achieved his goal of teaching others how to create their own opportunities and wishes to continue to do so by sharing his knowledge of grant application for adaptive sports equipment and training money," Streets said.

Also recognized with an LSIF Illumination Merit Award for 2022 was Adam Loftis, 15, of St. Albans. He underwent his first surgery when he was two days old and has dealt with epilepsy, chronic illness, cortical vision impairment, and chronic lung disease, requiring extensive time in hospitals for treatment.

"His parents were given a grim outlook for Adam's ability to achieve any of his developmental milestones.

Did this stop Adam? No way. Adam took his first steps at the age of 7 and his parents could not have been prouder. Their motto is 'Little things are big things,'" Streets said.

"In the beginning," she added, "he and his parents were given little hope for communication with Adam. While Adam is not able to speak verbally, he has learned to make his wishes known. Adam has passion for music, dancing, and hanging out with his friends. His biggest fans are his brothers, and even though they are big and tough athletes, they know just how much Adam works to achieve his goals. They have used his example of hard work and dedication as inspiration in their own goals and raising awareness of Down syndrome in their communities."



According to its website, the Luke Stone Illumination Fund was created in 2019 by Matt and Rebecca Stone of Summersville. Annually since then, the Luke Stone Illumination Fund has chosen at least one child or transitioning adult to receive a one-time Merit Award of \$1,000 dollars deposited into their WVABLE account. To be eligible for Merit Award consideration, the individual must be 21 years of age or younger, currently have or be willing to open a WVABLE account, and complete the award application, which includes essay questions on how the individual enhances the community.

The LSIF also "aspires to raise awareness of the struggles of those with disabilities and their families," its website states. Its web URL is [lsilluminationfund.com](https://lsilluminationfund.com), for more information regarding the nonprofit organization and its programs. Information is also available by emailing [info@lsilluminationfund.com](mailto:info@lsilluminationfund.com).

More information pertaining to WVABLE accounts can be found at [wvable.com](https://wvable.com).