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Our Indian River Lagoon

Plan to reduce Lake O discharges will be laid out Thursday at Rivers Coalition

Eve Samples: No obstacle is too great for this sixth-grade trumpeter



By Eve Samples

Posted January 29, 2014 at 7 p.m.

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PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD // BUY THIS PHOTO

CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS Ethan Heitner, 11, looks to Lower School Music Director John Barnes (not pictured) while playing the trumpet during practice Jan. 23.



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER ARNOLD

CHRISTOPHER

He walked into band class just after 1 p.m. on a sunny and cool day, the left arm of his navy sweatshirt tucked neatly into his pocket.

Ethan Heitner pulled a chair close to his music stand and gripped a pencil with the three fingers on his right hand.

When Pine School teacher John Barnes gave the signal, Ethan and the other sixth-graders wrote the names of



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ARNOLD/TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS Ethan Heitner, a sixth-grade student at The Pine School, removes his trumpet from its custom-made stand after the end of band practice Jan. 23 at the school's lower campus in Stuart. The school's maintenance man, David Allen, built the stand for Heitner.

More Eve Samples

Eve Samples is a columnist for Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers. This column reflects her opinion.

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musical notes as quickly as they could onto their photocopied work sheets.

When the "mad minute" drill was over, the children got out their instruments.

Ethan's is the trumpet.

He opened the instrument's case with his right hand and nudged it closed with his foot. Ethan then attached the trumpet to a custom-made stand by twisting it tightly onto the base.

The 11-year-old perched himself on the edge of his seat, his back board-straight, and waited for Mr. Barnes' cue.

Like the other children in his band class, Ethan can keep time. Like them, he's learning to read music.

Unlike his classmates, Ethan does not have a left arm. His right hand has three fingers.

It never occurred to him that those facts should stop him from playing the trumpet.

Sixth-graders at The Pine School are required to take either band or chorus, and Ethan chose band this school year.

He was drawn to the trumpet because he had friends who played it, and he initially tried holding it between his knees during class.

Mr. Barnes knew there had to be a better way.

He asked The Pine School's maintenance man, David Allen, to build a stand that would hold the trumpet steady and perpendicular.

A master carpenter who happens to be a musician himself, Allen first tried using plastic fittings to attach the trumpet to a microphone stand.

"It worked well," Allen said, "but not well enough."

Allen then used brass plumbing fixtures — and they proved sturdy enough for Ethan.

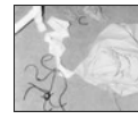
"If someone with one arm wants to play an instrument that requires two, you've got to be creative somewhere," Allen said.

When he was younger, Ethan would sometimes tell people he was attacked by a shark to explain his missing left arm.

Now he answers with the truth.

"He just says, 'I was born like that,' and tries to leave it at that," his mother, Kristine Heitner, said.

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Light Rain
Fog/Mist
Wind: N 12mph

Today
69°
61°

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JAN	JAN	JAN	BROWSE
29	30	31	
WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	MORE

Salsa Lessons For Everyone
(One-off place)

Worship services, Sunday school and youth groups 10 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church of Sebastian

Zumba with Cindy & Samantha 4:30 p.m.
River Walk Center

Worship services, Sunday school and youth groups 10 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church of Sebastian

Salsa Lessons For Everyone
(One-off place)

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It hasn't held him back.

Ethan has played soccer since he was three.

He can reel in a fish in the open ocean, holding the rod between his legs.

"He's got great hand-eye coordination," his mother told me.

Eventually, he wants to play on the golf team at The Pine School.

"I always forget that he doesn't have an arm," Kristine Heitner said. "I don't look at him like that — other than when he says, 'I want to play football.' "

As almost any mother would, she gets nervous thinking about her son getting tackled on the gridiron. Ethan's dream is to become a kicker for the Miami Dolphins.

There's another instrument he'd like to learn to play, too — the drums.

Allen, himself a drummer, said he would be honored to give him some pointers.

Ethan has inspired him. It would be a way to give back.

Last December, when Ethan's class played at The Pine School's holiday concert, Allen was in the audience.

"I started to tear up watching him play with something I made," Allen told me.

He will have plenty more chances to see Ethan perform.

Next school year, when he again has the choice between chorus and band, Ethan knows what which class he will opt for.

"I'm going to choose band," he said without hesitating. "I enjoy it."

Eve Samples is a columnist for Scripps Treasure Coast Newspapers. This column reflects her opinion. Contact her at 772-221-4217 or eve.samples@scripps.com.

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