

Garden City High School Best Buddies - Most Outstanding Chapter in New York State - Attends Leadership Conference



Group accepting Top Fundraising award from Founder and Chairman of Best Buddies, Anthony Kennedy Shriver

This year, I had the honor of attending the Best Buddies Leadership Conference (LC) in Bloomington, Indiana for the second time. Although I had attended last summer, this year's conference was by far more special.

Many factors went into making our experience so extraordinary. For the first time ever, a buddy from Garden City High School attended LC, Michael Mortensen. By having a Buddy attend LC, we were able to show why our Best Buddies chapter works so well and so hard to be successful. Michael's experience was unforgettable. At the conference, Michael participated in a speech writing class where he learned how to express his love for Best Buddies and improve his public speaking skills. While at LC, one learns about a "mission moment," which is when you realize that all of the work you have done for Best Buddies is worth it. For me, my mission moment was listening to Michael's speech. His speech touched every single person in the room and spoke volumes to the good that Best Buddies does. Afterwards, Michael looked at me and told me that LC was the best weekend of his life. For me, that moment made all of the work I have done as Chapter President this year worth every second. Garden City High School also had the privilege of attending LC with Mrs. Tammy Kear, our advisor and four other Best Buddies officers. Whereas most schools have one or two representatives, we had seven. It was an amazing experience

to bond with one another for a weekend in the Indiana summer heat surrounded by thousands of people that share the same passion.

Our Best Buddies chapter at Garden City High School, the reigning champs, defended our national title as the top fundraising team in the Country. This year, coming just short of \$24,000, we were able to help finance the opening of new chapters throughout Long Island. We were treated like celebrities! Michael and I had the privilege of giving a speech in front of the 3,000 attendees. Although a little nerve-wracking, being able to share what we have learned in front of everyone was a surreal experience. We also had the honor of being recognized as the Most Outstanding Chapter in New York State. The special treatment didn't end there. We all got to go on stage and accept our top fundraising chapter award by the Founder and Chairman of Best Buddies, Anthony Kennedy Shriver!! After accepting our award, we got to lead the conference in the LC Friendship Walk alongside Anthony, former NFL player Tony Richardson, and actress Lauren Palmer. The VIP treatment was so cool and made our chapter feel so special and grateful.

Thanks to SEPTA, our Principal, Ms. McLaughlin, our high school, our amazing students and buddies, and all of the parents and families that donated to our chapter. Each of you enabled us to have an incredibly successful year. An extra special thank you to SEPTA who donated countless goodies such as Best Buddies car magnets and LC t-shirts and Bob Basel and The Men's Association for our Walk t-shirts. We are looking forward to taking all that we have learned from LC and making our Best Buddies chapter even better!



