

Prom created for teens with sensory, social, other challenges

Caurie Putnam

Last fall, Brockport High School junior Courtney Langelotti had some concerns about prom. They weren't your typical, "What dress should I buy?" or "Should we take a limo or not," either.

"I realized I have some friends who probably wouldn't attend prom because the lights are too bright, the music is too loud or they'd have to wear a dress, which isn't comfortable for them," Langelotti said. "I wanted to do something to make sure the prom would be a more inclusive environment for everyone."

Langelotti decided to organize a prom where all her peers would feel welcome, despite sensory, social or other challenges. Her event — the Westside Unified Prom 2019 — was held April 5 at the Elks Lodge in Sweden.

It was not a school or extracurricular assignment, but an act of authentic love and friendship. Langelotti began volunteering in a classroom for peers with special needs when she was in the sixth grade and hopes to be an elementary special education teacher.

"This is totally something that comes from her heart. This is just who she is," said Dr. Lesli C. Myers-Small, superintendent of the Brockport Central School District. "It's so nice to see her provide this opportunity to students."

Langelotti, a member of Brockport's unified basketball team, invited students from nine west-side school districts to the prom via their special education and Unified Sports programs. (Unified teams are made up of people with and without intellectual disabilities; they're a program of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association and Special Olympics New York.) Students from Brockport, Holley, Rush-Henrietta, Spencerport, Hilton and Churchville-Chili high schools attended the Westside Unified Prom 2019 along with their dates from other schools.

The event, which was sponsored by Oaks Construction, was free and spared no details. From a helium balloon arch to gluten-free desserts, Langelotti thought of every detail. She procured donations of services and products from Get Caked Bakery, Idoweddingflowers, Bokeh Films, Sound Express, Elks Lodge 2110 and Wegmans.

Teachers from Brockport High School volunteered their time to chaperone the event. Other volunteers included Samantha Rogers, a 2018 graduate of Brockport High School and current Nazareth College student, who held a similar dance in April 2018 at Oliver Middle School in Brockport as her senior project.

"I was so excited when Courtney asked my permission to continue the idea," Rogers said. "Of course I said, 'Yes!' It's amazing to see how much she did."

Langelotti hopes to hold the prom again next year and have an underclassman shadow her and continue it when she graduates.

"I don't want the event to stop happening when I leave," Langelotti said. "This is something I feel passionately about and push on a lot of people. It's important to include everyone and to embrace that we're more alike than different."

Pick of the Week

The Ecology Club at Roberts Wesleyan College will host Jennyrae Brongo, founder of Homesteads for Hope, at 4 p.m. on Monday, April 15, in the Ellen Stowe Roberts Dining Room of Garlock Dining Commons, 2301 Westside Drive in Gates. Brongo will present "Nature: A Therapeutic Experience" and talk about how the nonprofit community farm she co-founded in 2013 changed the life of her brother with autism for the better. The event is free. For more information call (585) 3524673 or visit Homesteads for Hope on Facebook.

Contact Caurie at caurie@urgrad.rochester.edu with news from westside towns. She's on Twitter at @Caurie Putnam and on Facebook at [facebook .com/BrockportBlog](https://www.facebook.com/BrockportBlog).



Courtney Langelotti and Jalen Prior are teammates on Brockport High School's Unified basketball team. Langelotti organized the Westside Unified Prom 2019 on April 5 at the Elks Lodge in Sweden. CAURIE PUTNAM



Courtney Langelotti, center, with attendees of the Westside Unified Prom 2019 on April 5 at the Elks Lodge in Sweden. Langelotti, a junior at Brockport High School, organized and orchestrated the event.
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