

WINDOW

THE

REBECCA LEVASSEUR: "Never Give Up!"

Watching her daughter stride across the stage to receive her diploma had a special meaning for Josette Levasseur. She knew she'd made the right decision to have her come to The Maryland School for the Blind.

"I tell people you have to fight for your kids and make sure they get the education they need," she said. "I knew MSB was the right place for Rebecca.

They had everything she needed to get a good education and to learn how to be independent."

Rebecca had been having trouble in public school. "I failed math with flying colors," she said. "The overhead projector was my worst enemy; I had trouble seeing anything that was projected. And I needed to ask my friends to help me lug a bulky closed-circuit television and my huge textbooks around."

"At public school, everything seemed to go too fast," she

said. "I barely had the time I needed to finish things. But at MSB they give you the time you need and because our class was small, we were able to get additional assistance."

"I wouldn't have had the chance to be involved in sports in public school the way I have here. At MSB, they make sure you keep your grades up, but if

you are having trouble, they don't immediately kick you off the team. You contract with your teachers, and

for competition in swimming, goalball, track and field, and wrestling," she said. Her athletic prowess earned her the title of "Most Athletic" at the Senior Class awards.

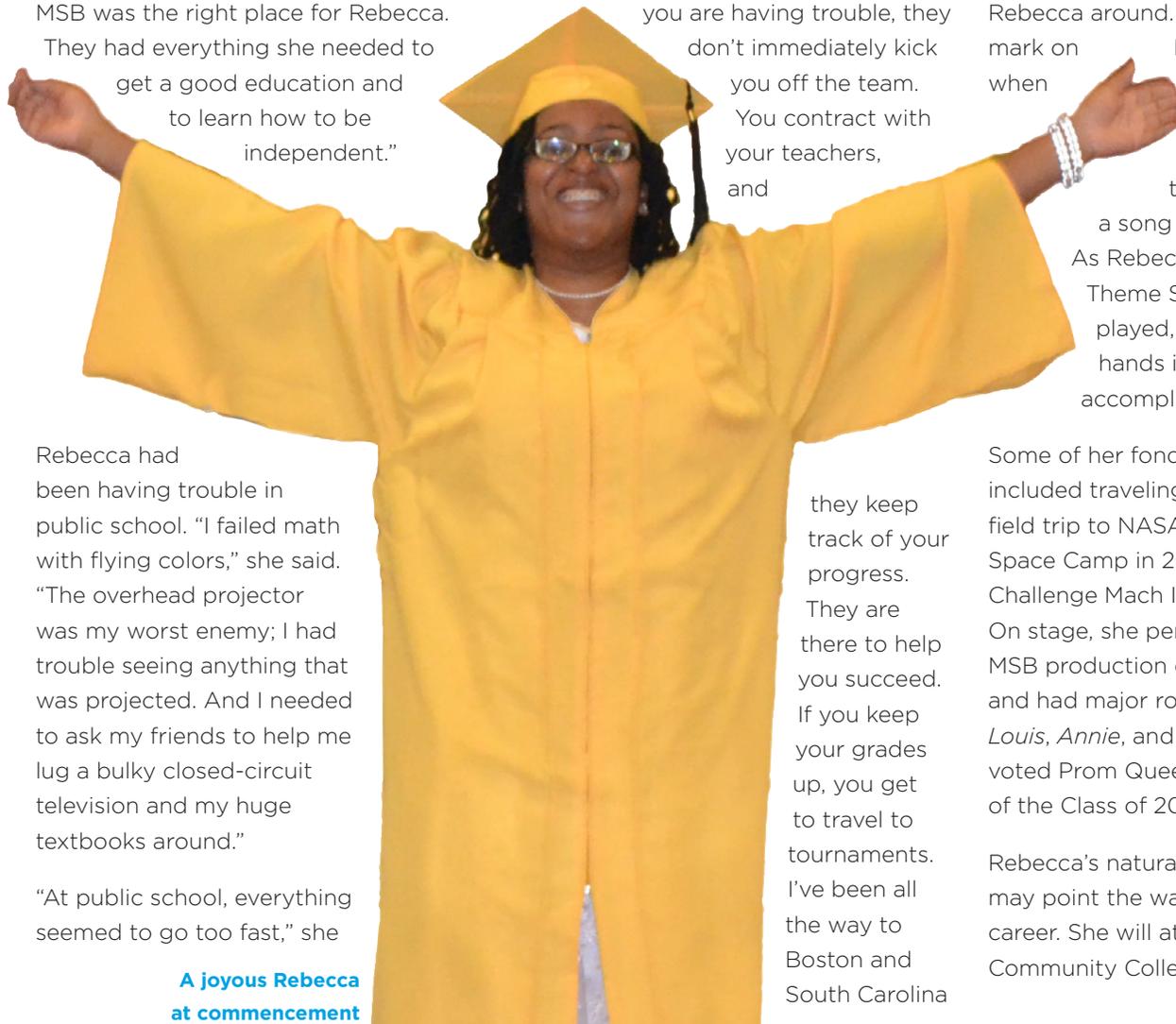
Rebecca spent seven years at MSB and according to Phyllis Simmons, a senior class advisor, "She is quite the character. There was never a dull moment with Rebecca around. She certainly left her mark on MSB." This was evident

when she recessed from the graduation ceremony, as all the graduates did, to a song they each selected.

As Rebecca's song, "The Theme Song from Rocky" played, she waived her hands in the air proud of her accomplishments.

Some of her fondest memories at MSB included traveling with her class on a field trip to NASA, attending Advanced Space Camp in 2012, and the Aviation Challenge Mach III Space Camp in 2014. On stage, she performed as Ariel in the MSB production of *The Little Mermaid*, and had major roles in *Meet Me in St. Louis*, *Annie*, and *Oliver*. She was also voted Prom Queen, and Vice President of the Class of 2015.

Rebecca's natural interest in computers may point the way to her future career. She will attend Prince George's Community College in Largo this fall



A joyous Rebecca at commencement

they keep track of your progress. They are there to help you succeed. If you keep your grades up, you get to travel to tournaments. I've been all the way to Boston and South Carolina

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The rain outside could not dampen the enthusiasm of graduates, family members, and guests at our 162nd commencement in June. As we gathered to celebrate the milestone achievements of our Class of 2015 on our campus, we focused too on the students in their local school systems who received services from MSB's outreach programs. We are proud to serve students here on our campus and throughout Maryland.

We were honored to have many distinguished guests attending the ceremony, including Governor Hogan's Secretary of Disabilities Carol Beatty, and State Superintendent of Schools Dr. Lillian Lowery. Dr. Lowery shared that MSB is recognized as having one of the best reputations for schools for the blind in the country. We were pleased to thank Dr. Lowery, who chairs the State of Maryland's Interagency Committee, that provided funding for our new state-of-the-art residential cottages and classroom buildings.

This summer we are also completing the development of our new outdoor athletic complex, which includes a new track and fields for beep baseball and soccer. This complex will be ready for use for our summer program. We thank the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation for their funding of this project.

We appreciate the generosity of all of our donors and the Maryland General Assembly including the support of our parents and volunteers. With this support our students are provided opportunities to succeed and reach their fullest potential. For this we are grateful.

Please join me in expressing congratulations to the eight members of the Class of 2015. We wish them every success.

Sincerely,



Michael J. Bina, Ed.D.
President



Dr. Michael J. Bina, MSB President, and Dr. Lillian Lowery, Maryland State Superintendent of Schools at MSB's commencement

SPOTLIGHT ON PHYLLIS SIMMONS



Phyllis Simmons can sum up her philosophy toward her work in one word: RESPECT.

Assistant Principal Phyllis Simmons just celebrated a milestone at The Maryland School for the Blind. She

has been a faculty member at the school for 40 years! She supervises paraeducators working with students who have multiple disabilities.

She emphasized the importance of respect in communicating with students and their families, and in promoting teamwork. "A lot of my teaching style and philosophy I can trace back to my own upbringing," she said. "My mother worked in school administration, and taught me that everyone deserves respect, no matter what their role. I was naturally shy, and she would encourage me to 'Step forward where I can see you!' She had me introduce myself to visiting principals. Consequently, today, I value the power of respect, and I'm comfortable giving presentations. My mother would say, 'I'm giving you an education; how are you going to give back?' She instilled in me the values I hold dear—values I now hope to instill in my staff and students."

"To me, respect means seeing each student as an individual, finding out what they can do, what they're good at, and what they like to do. Once we can really see who they are, it gives us a roadmap," she said. "We build on their strengths and celebrate each small milestone on the path to greater independence. The more they can do for themselves, the more it develops their self-esteem, and the easier it will be for them in the future — whether they get a job, pursue further education, or live in a group home or a home setting. We help them see themselves and be comfortable with who they are."

The world of disabilities has changed a lot since Phyllis began her career in 1974. "Back then, there were many children who lost their sight from rubella or from getting too much oxygen at birth," she recalled. "And we didn't have the benefit of technology that we do today. Augmentative communication devices have opened up doors for children who may be non-verbal. But some things such as building a supportive learning environment based on respect will never change. Nor should they."

THE CLASS OF 2015 – SMALL IN NUMBER, BIG AT HEART

It was a busy and exciting year for the small, but memorable class of 2015. The tight-knit group of eight students shared many experiences and successes throughout their years at MSB, but like most seniors, the last year of school was the most special. They embraced their upperclassmen status and enjoyed the perks, special events and activities that accompany senior year. Highlights included the President's breakfast, class trips to Dave and Busters and Sky Zone, and the Hawaiian themed prom. Their class motto was "Take it back and hold it true, 2015 belongs to you!"

On June 1, MSB celebrated their accomplishments at the school's 162nd commencement. The ceremony consisted of the conferring of diplomas, certificates and awards, with remarks from Dr. Michael J. Bina, MSB President; Edward J. Veilleux, MSB Board Chairman; Dr. Lillian Lowery, State Superintendent of Schools; and Carol Beatty, Governor Hogan's Secretary of Disabilities. The program also featured keynote speaker, Dr. Lorraine Costella. Dr. Costella serves on the MSB board of directors and is an Assistant Professor of Education at Goucher College. In her

address to the graduates, Dr. Costella quoted famous commencement speeches and encouraged the graduates to keep moving forward, follow their own path and never give up.

Although the Class of 2015 was one of the smallest graduating classes in recent history, they made a large impact on the school. Special awards were presented to three graduates, who exhibited leadership qualities and academic excellence throughout their years at MSB. Rebecca Levasseur, the senior class Vice President, received the B. Franklin Newcomer Award, which recognizes a student who demonstrates, through leadership and citizenship, a positive influence in both school and residential life. Andrew Kotowski, an MSB student for 18 years, received the Special Faculty



Aloha from Senior Class Officers, Chanta and Andrew

Commendation Award. Class President, Jenny Espino, was awarded the State Merit Scholarship Award.

In her speech to her fellow graduates, Espino summed it up best by saying "Even though we are a small class, we hope that we leave the biggest mark and that will make us the most memorable graduating class in MSB history."

The Class of 2015 Graduates:

Chanta Brown, Rebecca Levasseur, Joanna Grafton, Andrew Kotowski, Ricky Brown, Jenny Espino, Athbi Al-Mutairi, and John Logan Glenn



COMMUNITY SUPPORT



5th annual "Swirl for a Girl" Gala

On May 2, the Carman Lay Foundation held the 5th and final "Swirl for a Girl" Gala at the Hunt Valley Wyndham hotel, which benefits the students of MSB. This fundraising event was sponsored by Lewis Contractors and WBAL TV-11 and was hosted by Mary Beth Marsden of WBAL-Radio. The ballroom was transformed into "An Evening in Paris" complete with the Eiffel Tower and Seine River Bridge. Some guests strolled along the Champs Elysees and stopped to have their caricature drawn by street artists, while others danced to the music of the Sound Storm Band.

The Carman Lay Foundation was founded by Tricia and Gary Lay to honor the memory of their daughter, Carman, who was a student at MSB until her untimely death at the age of eight. The mission of the foundation is to provide funds to help the students of MSB reach beyond limits, acquire new skills, achieve what is possible and what sometimes seems impossible, and have experiences and relationships that make their lives more enriched and joyful.

"Swirl for a Girl" was created to not only be a fundraiser, but a celebration of Carmen's spirit and her legacy of exceeding expectations. The Paris theme was fitting for the final event as the foundation bid "adieu" to those who have supported it for the last five years. Although this was the final year for the gala, the foundation will continue to raise money for MSB students through their annual bull and oyster roast. Please save the date: October 23, 2015 at the Tall Cedars Hall in Parkville.

MSB thanks the Carman Lay Foundation for their continued support!

REBECCA LEVASSEUR (continued from page 1)

and then hopes to transfer to The University of Maryland, College Park. But first, she will travel with her church to Paris, Spain, and Portugal this summer.

Like her mother, Rebecca believes a good education is the key to a bright future. She credits MSB for giving her a solid foundation and the confidence to achieve her dreams. Her philosophy: "Never give up! Especially in this economy, you have to get the best education you can so you can get a good job and succeed." She is well on her way!



Rebecca and Athbi are crowned Prom Queen and King



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