

## World traveler, seasoned fundraiser, and trained pilot: Meet freshman Kathryn Russell

Imagine just graduating high school, yet already having traveled to all seven continents, earned a junior pilot's license, and raised more than \$100,000 for a local charity. Now imagine doing all this while losing your sight.

Meet incoming Suffolk freshman Kathryn Russell. The Rossville, Georgia native has accomplished more in her first 18 years than many people do in a lifetime.

Russell is a graduate of Baylor School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a private school near her suburban home. Baylor's mission is to instill in its students both the ability and the desire to make a positive difference in the world, and Russell can certainly claim to already have made that difference.

As part of a capstone project, Baylor students are required to take on a leadership role in something new to them. According to Shaw Wilson, dean of the school's 11th and 12th grade students, most projects were modest. But not Russell's. In just three weeks, she raised more than \$100,000 for Freedom Counseling Services, a substance-abuse rehabilitation center in nearby LaFayette, Georgia.

"I wanted to make a difference in the community," she explained. Her inspiration was a building her father donated to Freedom Counseling, and named after her. Taking it as a personal challenge and responsibility, Russell arranged a fundraising banquet, selling tickets, tables, and sponsorships.

Many of her donors were friends and associates of her father. Russell admits that in her quest for working strategies, she "stole" his cell phone, and began calling everyone on his speed dial; by the end of the first day she had raised more than \$30,000 and

eventually called more than 500 people and local businesses.

While many would consider this type of success uncommon at such a young age, accomplishment and exceeding expectations are not unusual for Russell. After all, this is a young woman who started flying lessons at



age 11. "I just woke up one morning and decided I wanted to fly," she says. She now has her junior pilot's license, and is considering selling her car to help finance a plane.

*In just three weeks, Russell raised more than \$100,000 for a substance abuse center. "I wanted to make a difference."*

Her quest to experience all the world has to offer is partly due to her deteriorating sight. She first started noticing vision loss in middle school, and doctors weren't sure why. But rather than feeling sorry for herself, her eye problems gave her drive and determination. "It made me want to do all I can do," she said.

What she wanted to do was visit as much of the world as possible while she could still see. She visited Europe

the first year, followed by Christmas in Antarctica and South America. Her travels have taken Russell to all seven continents.

Wilson says that Russell is low key about her accomplishments. He describes Russell as a "gifted, talented student" whose grades don't necessarily reflect her full ability. Russell missed quite a bit of her first two years of high school due to her vision issues, but made up for lost time. She still took Advanced Placement classes, and brought a worldly perspective to a sophomore-level required course she needed to take in her senior year in order to graduate. She even enrolled in a class with her mother at a local community college.

"She's determined and interested in getting it right," notes Wilson. "She makes the most of her life. She's inspirational."

Determination brings Russell to Suffolk University this fall as an accounting major. "I heard Suffolk has a good business and law program," she says, explaining that she had always wanted to attend school in the Northeast and experience the cultural differences of the Boston region, given her native Southern upbringing.

"I liked Suffolk because it's a smaller college, it has a great location, and the class sizes are smaller which is what I'm used to," she says, adding she considered other Boston-area schools. "Suffolk has a lot more to offer."

Although still experiencing significant loss of sight, her medical condition has stabilized so that she feels confident she will succeed at Suffolk.

The real challenge might be finding a parking spot on Tremont Street for her plane.

—Jon Boroshok