



Berkley

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BHS grad earns scholarship to study to be interpreter

By Joshua Gordon
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BERKLEY — Linda Booth, president of Deaf and Hearing Impaired Services, started the May Booth Scholarship Fund to honor her mother, May Booth, and all the work she did with the hearing impaired and those who wanted to help them.

Similarly, Jonathan Freeman, of Berkley, wanted to honor his grandfather, who was deaf, and his mother, who worked her whole life with the hearing impaired, by going to school to be an interpreter.

When Freeman, 22, applied for the May Booth Scholarship, Linda Booth said he seemed like a natural fit to be the recipient of the \$1,000 scholarship.

“Jonathan is a second-year student, which we require, but he comes from a deaf family with his grandfather being deaf and his mother an interpreter,” Booth said. “He has kind of been immersed in this world, and becoming an interpreter may not have been his first choice, but growing up through the years, he wanted to give back to those who raised him, being his mother and grandfather. Now, he wants to help others.”

Freeman is a 2010 Berkley High School graduate who spent his first three years of school at Oakland Community College studying to become an English teacher. When he was 11, his grandfather worked with him on communicating with the hearing impaired, and eventually that led him to change his career path to become an interpreter.

“It’s not a very glamorous or touching answer, but I chose to become an interpreter for insurance; by that I mean that once I am certified, I am essentially promised a job once I walk in with my certificate,” Freeman said. “I spent three years of college working towards becoming an English teacher, but for that career, I would need to go to a university and potentially search hard for a job, like I was looking for the Holy Grail.”

Freeman’s mother was a recipient of the same scholarship when she was studying American Sign Language in college, and she recommended that Freeman apply, as well.

While it may have taken a few years to get on this path, Freeman said he is happy with his choice because there is a need for interpreters in the area.

“One reason I chose to study (American Sign Language) is because there is a big need for skilled and certified interpreters in deaf culture,” he said. “One phrase that is constantly repeated is that ASL is not English on the hands — this means that one cannot simply write back and forth with the deaf person. I am a hearing male who was raised by a deaf adult, and that means that there is a big need for me to enter the field, especially if I interpret in hospitals (or) medical situations where it would be more comfortable to talk about things with a male interpreter present.”

May Booth started the Michigan Association of Elderly Deaf and Hearing Impaired in 1969 to focus on senior citizens with hearing impairments. After working with her mother’s company and another agency that her mother’s company merged with, Linda Booth started over 21 years ago with DHIS and built it to what it is today in Farmington Hills.

The scholarship was a way to remember all the work her mother did for many years, Booth said.

“My mother was such a mentor to new interpreters coming into the field, and she let them shadow her and learn from her,” she said. “Being the mentor she was, we wanted to encourage more people to go into these programs. We have a large deaf population in Michigan — having the eighth highest deaf population out of the 50 states — but we are 47th in the number of interpreters. We are the bottom of the barrel, so we really need more help.”

While he is aiming to help the hearing impaired when he graduates college, Freeman said he has come to enjoy being part of deaf culture and is happy he was able to learn from his family how to communicate with the hearing impaired when he was young.

“I get much satisfaction when I see people interacting with ease with a deaf person, and when I see someone interacting with them as if they were simply another person who knows a common language, it is a great feeling,” he said. “One aspect of the culture is that the people are blunt and straightforward, meaning that there is no beating around the bush or hesitation. Hearing culture is very two-faced; we hide things and embellish, while deaf culture is straightforward and blunt.

“In my personal opinion, there isn’t much hiding or embellishing in deaf culture.”