

Ms. Knowski goes to Washington

Written by SARAH McCRAW
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<http://www.ozaukeepress.com/images/062013/knowskiSM.png> **Ten-year-old girl who is a tireless advocate for those who suffer from the disease she lives with is part of a group that will lobby Congress for diabetes funding**

Shannon Knowski may not be too familiar with politics at the age of 10, but that's not stopping her from speaking with members of Congress in Washington, D.C., about an issue she knows well.

The Port Washington fifth-grader is one of four children from Wisconsin chosen as delegates for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Children's Congress.

Shannon, the daughter of Pat and Kurt Knowski, was 11 months old when she was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

In July, she will go before Congress to speak about the importance of funding research for a cure.



Shannon is no stranger to speaking in front of crowds. In 2009, she was the youth ambassador for Concordia University Wisconsin's Walk to Cure Diabetes team.

She also sang at a gala for juvenile diabetes research at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee in 2010.

Still, Shannon said, she's nervous about what she is going to say to politicians while in the national spotlight.

"They're very important people," she said.

This is the third time Shannon has applied to be a member of the Children's Congress, which assembles every two years. She is one of 150 delegates chosen from more than 1,000 applicants.

"It made me feel really happy to finally get picked," Shannon said. "The last few years I was too little to think of my own answers (to the application questions) so my mom helped, but this year it was more of my own answers."

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Shannon said being a delegate is important.

“I think it’s important because each year more and more kids speak out for what they believe, and it helps the children who have this,” she said.

Pat said her daughter was diagnosed with diabetes after she suddenly became ill in 2003. A trip to the emergency room revealed that Shannon’s blood-sugar level was 788. A normal blood sugar count is between 70 and 120.

Shannon tests her blood-sugar levels five to six times each day because her pancreas does not produce insulin, the hormone that breaks down sugar, starches and other foods into energy for the body.

The amount of insulin she needs depends on how many carbohydrates she ingests.

To prepare for her trip, Shannon created a scrapbook that tells the story of her diagnosis and explains what life with diabetes is like.

“My scrapbook has things in it like what we take on vacation, when I was diagnosed and my lows and highs (with diabetes),” Shannon said. “We also had to make a video about what we thought about going to Children’s Congress and what everyday life is like.”

She also wrote letters to Wisconsin senators and representatives.

She’s will also sing the song “Promise to Remember Me” with the group.

Shannon said she especially enjoys blogging for the foundation’s website.

“I like that you get to share your own opinion and not worry about what someone else might think, and you’re sharing information,” she said.

Shannon will bring Wisconsin and Port Washington to the congress through postcards and keychains included in gift bags she is making.

Watching her daughter make the best of her situation makes their family very proud, her mother said.

“I feel sad in a way that she had to grow up so quickly because of it, but she turns it into a positive and is trying to make some good out of it,” Pat said. “We’re proud that she has this attitude and she wants to make a difference.

“It’s amazing to see that our little girl has those qualities, and she can reach out.”

Before she heads to the nation’s capital, Shannon will work on another goal — raising \$10,000 for the Walk to Cure Diabetes fundraiser held at the Milwaukee County Zoo.

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A fundraiser, "Stepping for Shannon," will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, June 29, at Advantage Automotive in Saukville.

Raffle tickets to win Milwaukee Brewers and Paul McCartney tickets will be sold. All proceeds from car washes and oil changes will also go toward finding a cure for the disease.

Image Information: SHANNON KNOWSKI and the scrapbook she will take with her to Washington, D.C. Photo by Sam Arendt