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Sydney Martin receives D39 citizen award



Sydney Martin (right) holds the hand of her father, Brad, during a ceremony where she was recognized as the District 39 Educational Foundation's Distinguished Citizen Award recipient on Thursday, April 30 at the Michigan Shores Club in Wilmette. Eric DeGrechie/22nd Century Media



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While walking along the beach at Gillson Park, so often we see rocks lying in the sand, but don't give them much thought. We may grab one and skip it across the surface of Lake Michigan and then continue our stroll.

Sydney Martin, 18, picks them up and changes people's lives.

The Wilmette resident and New Trier senior was honored on Thursday, April 30, by the District 39 Educational Foundation with its Distinguished Citizen Award at a ceremony at the Michigan Shores Club.

"This is very special," said Martin, who is the youngest recipient in the eight years of the award. "When I found out, I was absolutely speechless. It's never been given to a young person before that doesn't have a career and isn't well into whatever they're doing in life. I still have so much to do."

At the age of 10 while a student at Romona Elementary School, Martin was diagnosed with Langerhans Cell Histiocytosis, or LCH, a rare blood disease. She underwent surgery and received six months of chemotherapy.

Prior to her diagnosis, Martin had started her own rock necklace business for friends and family. During her treatment, these same people wore their rock necklaces to show support for her ordeal. As her condition improved, Martin realized she could sell her "Syd Rocks" necklaces to raise money for the disease.

In 2012, Martin's family partnered up with the District 39 alumna to create the Giving Rocks Foundation, for which she is the founder and director. To date, Martin has raised \$350,000 for LCH and pediatric cancer through fundraising events and Syd Rocks merchandise sales.

"Sydney is an amazing young woman. Not only does she show that you can overcome a serious illness, but she instills in women that they can become an entrepreneur and do great things," D39 Educational Foundation Trustee Elizabeth McKenna said.

Among Martin's countless accolades, she is a Kids Advisory board member at Lurie Children's Hospital and captain of the New Trier dance team.