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January 18, 2021

Dear MIPA Judges,

Olivia Carmody used to freeze up. At the instant that she was recognized or celebrated among among her peers or was asked to speak up in a classroom setting, she her face morphed like a mood ring. She preferred to be behind a camera, tapping into her highly-attuned skills of observation and analysis.

But Olivia doesn't freeze up anymore. In fact, she verily bubbles over with thoughts and ideas

Through her dogged efforts to build her knowledge base and confidence, through her insistence on stepping into the unknown and facing her fears, Olivia has become one of the most highly-respected, knowledgeable leaders on a staff of 65 highly-motivated, high-achieving yearbook journalists.

By the time she graduates, I will have worked with Olivia in a total of five journalism classes ranging from her sophomore year as staffer to two years of photo editorships culminating in her senior year. I have traveled with her to journalism workshops and conventions to Chicago and twice to MIPA Camp (and to countless others in between - she jumps at a chance to explore and meet new people). I've cheered with her as she earns awards for her photography and as she captures peak emotion in her sports or graduation photos. Through this multitude of experiences, Olivia has committed herself to encouraging others, creating presentations and lessons to teach our new staff to be adept at shooting in manual mode, and encouraging them and helping them make their work publication-ready.

As a photographer, two of Olivia's finest attributes are her watchfulness and growing confidence. While she tends to be quiet in a large group, it is not for lack of ideas or insights. In our nationally-recognized yearbook program, Olivia has been challenged to show how she connects to others, how she reports their stories, and how she crafts her writing to reflect the power of a moment. She doggedly tackles all sorts of story telling. She has worked to deepen the level of human connection, both in her interviewing and photography. She has leaped at the opportunity to experiment and be creative, but is just as happy to roll up her sleeves to take on a last-minute photo shoot that no one else could attend. None of this was accomplished through any feat of mine, but rather, through Olivia's tenacity.

The anecdote that best epitomizes Olivia's commitment to yearbook and the greater school community is her willingness to pick up a project of building and painting three big canvas backdrops in her garage over summer vacation. She and her mom carted them to the yearbook photo studio in August and set them up, giving us the opportunity to offer reduced rate senior portraits to students in need - and of course, Olivia co-chaired that project, scheduling photos on her own time, finding her way into a COVID-closed school, and taking tens of senior portraits. In addition, she has contributed what I call a "legacy project" to the staff in organizing our valuable photo equipment (almost 100 pieces in total), setting us up with a checkout system during COVID, and also curating our "best of" photos of the year, which were invaluable when school closed in March and the school needs community photos for various senior videos. All of these projects are labors of love - and Olivia truly loves Grand Blanc Schools.

Among many other talented and dedicated leaders, Olivia is one of the few I know I can call on with any idea or concern and she will immediately develop a plan to improve the situation. She will step up to photograph any event, from the mundane to the thrilling. Such commitment is rare in a person who juggles as much as Olivia - an athlete, leader, and honors student. In addition, Olivia has become *the* authority whom staff members seek for suggestions and problem-solving, making her an expert in our program. And while Olivia keeps working to build confidence to teach large groups, she is patient and inspiring in one-on-one teaching sessions. She regularly provides written critiques and kudos to her peers for photo assignments.

Sincerely,

Ava Y. Butzu  
Teacher/Adviser, Grand Blanc High School

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