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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## The KSHSAA Selects Spirit of Sport and Heart of the Arts Award Recipients

**TOPEKA, Kan.** - The KSHSAA Student Advisory Team has selected Alex Edwards, senior from Jackson Heights High School, for the 2020 KSHSAA Spirit of Sport Award and Edward Shafer, theater director at Olathe East High School, for the Heart of the Arts Award.

### Spirit of Sport

Like the twists, turns, hills and rough terrain of any cross country course, Alex Edwards' life has been a challenge, to understate it mightily. At age 3, Edwards was diagnosed with a heart condition called Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy. At age 5, Alex's mother died of the same heart condition. At age 12, Alex received a pacemaker. At 15, Alex's life expectancy was day to day. Then on October 30, 2018, the day after Alex Edwards' 16th birthday, he received a new heart.

A student who was unable to attend school regularly for many years, who when at school struggled to breathe walking from class to class, suddenly had new life.

"Alex Edwards has participated in cross country the last two seasons. This year Alex will receive a varsity letter in cross country for being a scoring member of the cross country team. He participated on varsity for all nine meets this year. Alex was also the team's fifth runner of the 2020 state qualifying cross country team, where he finished 90th place overall. Alex also improved his times from 2019 to 2020 in dramatic fashion. In 2019, Alex's best time in the 5K race was 43:12. This year, in his last home meet, Alex ran a personal best 30:51. That is a 12:21 improvement in just one year," said Jackson Heights cross country coach, Brad Alley.



You may ask yourself, why? Why run cross country? After all Alex has been through, wouldn't going to school and being with his friends be enough? Well, one of those friends didn't have that privilege.

Two months after Alex had a successful heart transplant, his close friend and classmate, Garrett Klahr, died in a car accident. Klahr loved the sport of cross country. So, with his new heart, Alex put all of it into cross country just like Garrett. The 2019 season was certainly a challenge, but in 2020 Edwards made a commitment in his last year at Jackson Heights to become a runner. Not missing a single race for the varsity team, Edwards showed improvement with every step in the journey.

One day after the two-year anniversary of his heart transplant, Alex crossed the finish line at the KSHSAA Class 1A State Cross Country Championship.

"Alex has inspired a school, community and state with his accomplishments this year," said Coach Alley.

A true spirit of the sport.

### Heart of the Arts

Edward Shafer, a teacher at Olathe East High School, has not let the pandemic slow down the work with Olathe East Theatre. While many programs have struggled to find ways to have performances for the students and community, Mr. Shafer has gotten creative in keeping theatre life as normal as possible. While students have spent much of their time in a remote setting this year, he has found ways to engage students in the arts with theatrical and musical productions.

Already this year there have been four performances, all of which have been virtual and made available for families to view online. There has been the Senior Showcase of one-act plays, the production of Crazytown, the Digital Musical Revue, and most recently, Olathe East Live, a series of sketch comedies. If that is not enough, he has been casting The Outsiders and the musical, Tarzan, for second semester. [Click HERE](#) for a complete listing of the 2020-21 productions by Olathe East Theatre.

The virtual productions have been as enjoyable to view as the in-person would have been. Mr. Shafer has taken the challenge of the remote and virtual world we are in and turned it into a positive experience for the students and community. Even through facility availability issues, Mr. Shafer never flinches when a new challenge is put in front of him. Instead, he smiles and starts working on a solution to the problem.



Mr. Shafer has been chosen for the Heart of the Arts Award for his unwavering support and leadership of the Olathe East theater program during these trying times.

The two award recipients will be recognized at an event of their choosing. Both nominations will now move on to a selection of nominees for the NFHS Section 5 award.

### About the Awards

The KSHSAA Student Advisory Team participates in the selection for the state of Kansas honorees.

As state honorees they will receive a plaque to be displayed at the school. The presentation of the plaque will take place at a KSHSAA tournament or local event yet to be determined. The nominations have been submitted for consideration by the National Federation of State High School Associations for national recognition.

### Other Nominees this year in Kansas:

#### Spirit of Sport

Joseph Toigo - KC Turner  
Chanelle Dieckmann - Olathe East  
Ronald Samuel Arrick - Olathe Northwest  
Breah Lynn Yourdon - Wichita Classical

#### Heart of the Arts

Crew Daniel Shafer - Olathe Northwest  
Shelby Hanna - KC Turner