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## COMMUNITY NEWS

### St. Petersburg Teen Serves As Mentor For Young People with Disabilities

*The Weekly Challenger*

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St. Petersburg - The probability of a professional golfer making a hole-in-one varies. The probability of a youth making a hole-in-one to win a golf tournament is slim-to-none. Austin Newgreen, a 17-year-old student at Center Academy, experienced this victory at 12-years-old living with a form of autism known as Asperser's Syndrome.

"I didn't get why everyone made a big deal about me making a hole-in-one because I thought people got them all the time," Austin explained. "When I told my Dad, he almost cried. He has been playing golf for 50 years and never had one. That's when I knew what a big deal it was."

Asperser's Syndrome is a developmental disorder that makes it difficult to socialize and interact. People with Asperser's typically have trouble communicating with others and exhibit social awkwardness. Austin tends to become uncomfortable around people he does not know and worries about new experiences.

"Sometimes I don't understand what others are talking about or I just feel uncomfortable until I get to know them," Austin said. "I worry about a lot of new things but once I give it a try, it is usually OK."

This year, Austin was chosen to serve as a mentor to more than 50 of his peers during the annual Florida Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) held July 21-25 in Tallahassee. The event is hosted by The Able Trust and co-sponsored by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council. The week-long forum is designed to teach students with disabilities about personal leadership through workshops, social activities, and mentoring opportunities.

Austin returned to YLF as a member of the junior staff. He joins a large number of students with disabilities, who gain valuable information at YLF and use the experience to pursue college, vocational training, or simple tasks they were afraid to accomplish before attending the forum.

"YLF is a great program," Austin said. "At first I was scared but everyone was so nice. Once I got there I didn't even call home all weekend. I met a lot of good people and have kept in touch with a few of them. That's kind of cool."

The forum helped Austin to break out of his shell and become more social. He is currently a volunteer for the First Tee Golf program, which provides young people of all backgrounds an opportunity to develop life-enhancing values such as confidence, perseverance and judgment through golf and character education. Standing at 6'5, Austin serves as a coach to younger children seeking to learn the game of golf.

"The First Tee Golf program teaches kids to be good people and good golfers," Austin explained. "I help the coach with some instructions for the kids first then we break up into groups. I take 2-4 kids out for nine holes of golf. I help them with their game."

Since YLF began 11 years ago, more than 500 students across Florida have traveled to Tallahassee with hopes of gaining career goals and improving their leadership and social skills. Each year, YLF alumni eagerly return to the program as junior and senior staff

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members to share their experiences with the new YLF delegates. "YLF is a life-changing experience for these students. They leave the forum with more confidence and courage to pursue their career goals," said Dr. Susanne Homant, president and CEO for The Able Trust. "Our mission at The Able Trust is to provide fair employment opportunities to Floridians with disabilities. At YLF, participants are exposed to many different experiences that prepare them to live independently and build skills needed to enter the workforce." Austin's long-term goal is to attend college and major in mechanical design. His ultimate dream is to become an automobile designer. "I would love to be a mechanical engineer because I like designing things," Austin said. "I would really love to design cars but I might be able to design something that may help someone do something easier or that they couldn't do." For more information about the Florida Youth Leadership Forum, visit [www.floridaylf.org](http://www.floridaylf.org).

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