

# DeFalco, Epps, and Rush recipients of 2017 Ted Gruszkowski Jr. Youth Star Award

Jarrett DeFalco, Deborah Epps, and Thomas Rush are the 2017 recipients of the prestigious NCAUSBCA Ted Gruszkowski Jr. Youth Star Award, which is named in honor of the late association Hall of Fame member who was a strong supporter of area youth bowling. The announcement of this year's winners took place January 21 prior to the start of opening round of the NCAUSBCA 48th Annual Youth Invitational Scratch Singles Tournament at Bowl America Manassas.

The award winners, honored for their bowling achievement and/or service to youth bowling, each were presented with a plaque and \$200 in scholarship funds, which will be administered through the USBC SMART program. In addition, their names will appear on the plaque that contains the names of the 19 previous award recipients.

## JARRETT DeFALCO Leesburg, Virginia

Jarrett DeFalco, 19, graduated from Heritage High School in 2015. He is presently a staffer at



Kenny Robinson and Jarrett DeFalco

the Off 7 Bowling Pro Shop, where he works for Geovel Lopez. Jarrett also is a Junior Staff Representative with Creating the Difference (CtD), which seeks

to educate bowlers and inspire people to work together to grow the sport of bowling. This is Jarrett's last year as a youth bowler, and he has had a very impressive run. His accomplishments include a Tournament of Champions victory

and several 600 Club wins, numerous Vern Burke Scholarship Tournament victories, four PJBT titles, 38th and 64th place finishes at Junior Gold, numerous NCAUSBCA Scratch All-Events and State Scratch All-Events titles, Top 8 finishes in the NCAUSBCA Youth Invitational Scratch Singles, high placement in several Pepsi Tournaments, and an eighth-place finish at the 4th Annual Tough Stuff event.

Jarrett's high average this season approaches the 235 level. He has 15 perfect games and two 800s, with a high series of 836.

Considering Jarrett's past and looking at Jarrett today, you will find a night and day personality. He has shown that he can be responsible by maintaining a job, going to school, and showing respect toward adults and his fellow teammates. His transformation has gone 180 degrees from this time last year.

He continues to excel on the lanes and reach for his goals. Robert Morris University has contacted the DeFalco family, requesting that Jarrett attend the school this fall. He currently plans to attend Robert Morris University.

Everyone deserves a second chance.

## DEBORAH EPPS Fort Washnigton, Maryland

Deborah Epps started bowling at the age of 4



Deborah Epps and Marina Akers-Epps

at Shaw AFB Bowling Center in South Carolina, where she was a bumper bowler. Her mother bought her a 5-pound Scooby Doo ball, drilled it fingertip, and took away the bumpers!

Needless to say, that summer was a bumpy road, but that just gave Deborah the determination to get this sport. As the years went by, Deborah became more and more engrossed into bowling—she almost had to—as the entire family bowled and her mother was her coach.

Once the family moved back to this area in 2006, Deborah joined the Silver Hill Strikers (SHS) at AMF Marlow Heights and flourished. She stayed in the Bronze division (100–119 average) for two years but quickly moved up, skipping the Silver division (120–149), and landed into the Gold division (150–169), where she averaged 152 at age 9. For the next several years, she joined and stayed in the Platinum division (170–190) until last year, where she was placed in the Titanium division (191-plus).

As she began to fine tune her skills, she began to understand the sport more and help others, including several members of the Silver and Gold divisions. Even up through last year, she has helped several of the SHS youths earn scholarship funds at several local tournaments.

Deborah has represented herself and this area in several local, regional, and national tournaments. She has placed in numerous 600 Club singles tournaments, twice finished second in the TNBA Eastern Regional Junior Tournament Team and Doubles events, finished fourth in the NCAUSBCA 2012 Invitational Scratch Singles and countless others. She has won the Nelson Perry Tournament and most recently won a Central Jersey Girls Scratch Tournament at Majestic Lanes in Woodbridge, N.J. In Junior Gold tournaments, Deborah has had great showings, seeming to finish just around 100 pins less than the cuts.

Deborah has held one of the highest youth aver-

ages in this area the past several years. She finished second in the 2013–2014 Juniors division with a 192.0139, third in the 2014–2015 Majors/Seniors division with an 182.7967 and then placed first in the Majors/Seniors last season with a 191.2338. Deborah started bowling in the Sport Challenge Tour travel league in Virginia in 2015 that really helped her game because it is bowled on Sport patterns.

Deborah is not only knowledgeable about bowling, she is excellent in school as well. Deborah attends the Academy of Health Sciences at Prince George's Community College, where she holds a 4.5 high school GPA and a 3.808 collegiate GPA. In May 2017, Deborah will graduate with a high school diploma and an Associate's Degree in General Studies. She has several colleges looking at her for full-ride scholarships, but she needs to hurry and pick one!

Deborah currently has a 208 league high average in the Fort Meade Youth League, with several 700 series already bowled.

If you ask her about this sport called bowling, be prepared for a lesson. Deborah has so much passion for this sport that she tapes all the bowling telecasts and watches them over and over again. If you don't see her practicing, you may see her helping out a couple of the youths, or even some adults!

## THOMAS RUSH Centreville, Virginia

Thomas Rush started his journey with bowling at the age of 6. He completely immersed himself



in the sport and with much practice and hard work, and with the help of coaches, found his passion for bowling. Through bowling, he has accomplished a great respect for the game and for life.

His bowling accomplishments include placing fourth in the 2011 Invitational, a 300 game in 2015, and a 299 game in 2014.

Thomas's desire to improve his game has afforded him many opportunities. At the young age of 11, Thomas was selected to represent the United States for bowling in Vienna, Austria with the People-To-People Sports Ambassador Tour. He was there for

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### Past NCAUSBCA Ted Gruszkowski Jr. Youth Star Award recipients

2008 — Eric Helmrich, Adam Mitchell, Allen Windsor

2009 — Alonso "A.J." Kinney Jr.

2010 — Malcolm James

2011 — Jason Eman, Brandon Lowe, Kayla Meadows

2012 — Zahir Holmes

2013 — Conner Kolessides

2014 — Gene Blair, Nicholas Dean, Michael Simpson

2015 — Samuel Anderson, Tabitha DeBat,  
Amara Speights

2016 — Cayla Davidson, Brandon Driver,  
David Zweiban

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two weeks (without his parents) and worked closely with Team USA head Coach Jeri Edwards. He made it to the finals while in Austria and gained a new respect for the game while competing with people from around the world. There he made lifelong friends and had once-in-a-lifetime bowling experiences.

Thomas also was selected to participate in the 2015 Bowling Combine (one of only 60 male bowlers from across the U.S.), where he received high evaluations in all aspects of his bowling game as well as his personality profile and coachability. While there, he had the incredible opportunity to work with Team USA members.

Thomas enters as many tournaments as he can afford. He placed fifth in the Danny Wiseman Tournament in 2015 and 2014. He won two Youth/Adult scratch tournaments in 2016, and placed second in the handicap division. In 2015, Thomas was introduced to the Junior Gold Bowling Program, where he learned to compete at the highest level. He won the State Qualifier and went on to come in the top half of the U20 division. During his second year at Junior Gold, he came in the top third and placed 28th of 220 U20 boys in the Survivor Tournament, qualifying him for the Cleveland games in 2017.

Thomas works close to 40 hours a week to support his passion for bowling. His earnings have eased the financial burden on his parents and go to his equipment, entry fees, practicing, and even lodging for tournaments. He is currently saving up to attend college, where he can bowl competitively at a higher level.

While not on the lanes, Thomas has always found a way to give back. He is a frequent blood donor for the Inova Blood Bank. He has volunteered to coach younger bowlers with Have-A-Ball classes, as well as on league days, and volunteered to bowl in the Special Olympics Tournament in November of 2016, where he was asked to help coach these special athletes for future events. He has put on baseball clinics for younger children and raised money and participated in events to raise awareness of childhood leukemia. He also has worked with the Special Olympics baseball program. Additionally, he has worked on environmental concerns, such as stream monitoring for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Project, where he was responsible for collecting signs of life in Cub Run Stream. His findings were reported to the state.

Peers have described Thomas as “probably the most underrated bowler around.” Coaches have described him as the most coachable bowler they have worked with—fiercely competitive, motivated, and truly dedicated to the sport of bowling, as well as a terrific teammate.