

Search: Site Web

GO

News Sports Opinion Features Marketplace Subscribe Classifieds Yellow Pages Obituaries Squall L

Headlines

History lives

April 21, 2007

Student's project brings visit by Keller's great-niece

By Donna Vavala

PANAMA CITY BEACH

A 13-year-old Surfside Middle School student's video documentary on the life of Helen Keller captured first prize at the Bay County History Fair and prompted a visit from Keller's great-niece Friday.

Alex Anne Spencer collected a number of black and white photos of Helen Keller, from infancy through her 80s, and narrated and wrote the story for the moving film. She also included interviews with a woman who teaches the blind to sign and a physician who specializes in eye diseases.

Keller Adams Johnson was named after, but never got to meet, her great-aunt, Helen Keller, the world-famous woman who triumphed over blindness and deafness to graduate from college, write books, travel internationally and hobnob with presidents. Keller died in 1968, two years before Johnson was born.

Johnson, who lives just down the road from Helen Keller's childhood home, Ivy Green, in Tuscumbia, Ala. — now a museum — travels the world and makes about 150 appearances a year, sharing her story.

"I started doing this in 1992 when I graduated from college," Johnson said. "I knew someone had to carry on (Keller's) legacy and make sure that the needs of deaf and blind people are met. What better person to do this than me?"

When Spencer thought about whom to feature in her history project, Helen Keller immediately came to mind.

"She's always been an inspiration to me, how she could learn so much without being able to see or hear," Spencer said. "I was researching and typing in random things on my laptop to get information on Helen Keller, and I found the American Foundation for the Blind, which listed Keller Johnson. I started e-mailing her, getting more information and conducted a telephone interview with her."

Spencer also invited Johnson to visit Surfside and was pleasantly surprised when she accepted.

"I said I'd be glad to," said Johnson, adding she had just viewed Spencer's video documentary for the first time and was impressed. "I wish I could



Terry Barner / The News Herald Keller Adams Johnson talks about the life of her great-aunt, Helen Keller, left in background poster, during a presentation to Surfside Middle School students Friday in Panama City Beach.

5-Day Forecast

64°F

THU: **79F / 64 F**
FRI: **79F / 61 F**

Brand new 2006 4 br, 3 ba, located in all n » Read	4 br 2 ba in Great location, W/D hkup, supe » Read	4 br 2.5 ba, Mexico Bch, just finished, upg » Read
---	---	---

Skip The Assets- Beautiful Bay Gelding. Exc » Read	FF: Southport 1204 and 1208 13th St. Near t » Read	21' Aerolite Travel Trailer. roof air, low » Read
---	---	--

Share This Content

- [Email to a Friend](#) [Printer-Friendly Form](#)
- [Submit to Digg](#) [Submit to Reddit](#)
- [Submit to Fark](#) [Submit to Del.icio.us](#)

Top Stories

- [Bowls to be filled for needy Bay Countian](#)
- [Airport seeks grant funds](#)
- [Child's injury raises queries](#)
- [It's a celebration!](#)

hire her to travel with me. Maybe when she gets out of college, she can take over for me.”

Spencer’s classmates gathered in the school’s music room to view the video, which will be judged in the state History Fair on May 4.

Johnson followed with a slide show presentation that documented her famous great-aunt’s life in greater detail, along with some personal recollections.

“My grandmother made sure I knew as much about Helen Keller as I could,” Johnson said. “By the time I was 9, I blindfolded myself and stuffed cotton in my ears and rode my bicycle in to downtown Tuscumbia” to see how it felt to be blind and deaf.

“I ended up with several broken bones,” she said. “My mother said, ‘If you want to know something about Helen Keller, just ask me.’”

Johnson related another story about how much Keller loved swimming.

“She loved to swim in the ocean; she loved the waves,” Johnson said.

Keller was swimming one day, Johnson said, and her friend on shore saw a big wave coming. Unable to get Keller’s attention, her distraught friend could only watch as a huge wave washed over Keller. She couldn’t see Keller anywhere. Suddenly, she surfaced, covered in seaweed and spitting water.

Keller’s first question upon swimming to shore was, “Who put the salt in the water?”

**[EmeraldCoast.com](#) | [Northwest Florida Daily](#) |
[Walton Sun](#)
[PanamaCity.com](#) | [The Apalachicola Time](#)**

© 2007 *The News Herald*

[Privacy Policy](#) / [User Agreement](#) / [Adv](#)
[Local Business Profiles](#)