

A Rising STAR in Lake Mary

By Emily Holbrook | Photo by John Zawacki, www.jzstudios.com

From mastering the oboe to relentless volunteering, 14-year-old **Sameer Bhatia** is thriving in a community that supports civic responsibility and the arts.

A member of Boy Scouts since the first grade, **Sameer Bhatia** of Lake Mary has learned the importance of giving back to the community with a selfless drive. Along with other troop members, he has volunteered at Scouting for Food, Adopt-a-Road and environmental cleanups at every weekend campout. Bhatia has also volunteered to mentor younger scouts, both as a den chief and as a summer camp assistant, all while earning numerous badges.

“For merit badges, you have to take initiative and do the work,” Bhatia says. “It requires discipline. You definitely have to work hard and push yourself. What we learn in scouts helps us later in life, too.”

According to Troop 234 Scoutmaster **Joel Owens**, at the young age of 14, Bhatia has nearly completed all requirements as a Life Scout and is almost in reach of the rank of Eagle Scout. “One of the things that stands out for me about Bhatia is his desire to excel at all he does and to balance his time and priorities in order to participate in a wide variety of efforts,” says Owens.

A Family's Civic Tradition

But Bhatia's volunteering efforts do not stop with the Scouts. This high school freshman, along with his older sister, **Sarena**, and his mother, **Sonia**, volunteered with the Red Cross to assist the displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina. And Sameer's efforts within the community have not gone unrecognized.

Every year, Disney honors one outstanding student from each elementary, middle and high school as the Disney Dreamer and Doer. To mark the 25th year of the program, Disney chose volunteer work in the community as the sole criteria for selection. Sameer was selected as the Disney Dreamer and Doer for Greenwood Lakes Middle School, following in the path of sister Sarena, who won the award in eighth grade while enrolled at Millennium Middle School.

Sameer's drive to succeed runs in the Bhatia family. His father, **Mohamood**, serves as vice president of a local corporation where he helped form the company's diversity program. Mahamood also volunteers within the family's religious community. Meanwhile, **Sonia** holds a doctorate in psychology, has been named volunteer of the year for Seminole Healthy Start Coalition and has earned the President's Award for community service through her work with the American Red Cross. And Sarena is currently enrolled in a volunteer program called Service Leadership Congress through the family's faith community.

A Cultured Teen

When Sameer isn't volunteering, you can find him practicing the oboe, drums or piano. He began playing the oboe in elementary school, and, for the past two years, he has been selected for Seminole County's All-County Middle School Honors Band. He has earned superior medals for his oboe solos for three consecutive years. But his love of music doesn't stop there. Sameer has a passion for drumming and will be on Lake Mary High School's drumline this fall.

In addition to his musical interests, Sameer has recently unearthed his acting talent. This past year, he took an advanced acting class in school and discovered an affinity for musical theatre. He played Horton the elephant in the school's production of “Seussical Jr.,” portraying the earnest, caring and beleaguered Dr. Seuss character to great reviews and earning the Rising Star award from his drama teacher. He attended his first District Thespian Festival and came away with a superior medal for his monologue and Best in Show award for a duet pantomime.

Suzanne Reeves, Greenwood Lakes Middle School drama director, has taken notice of Sameer's talent in theatre. “I believe that Sameer has been ‘bitten’ by the acting bug, and acting is in his blood,” says Reeves. “He definitely has a natural talent and is truly a rising star.”

With his numerous extracurricular activities, Sameer still finds time to study, constantly earning a place on his school's honor roll. This rising star adheres to his family's “failure is not an option” motto and, with the support of our community, will continue to shine. ■



Do you know a talented teen who loves to give back? Tell us about it at www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com.