

# Potrykus serves as soccer ambassador

BY JONI HUBBED  
STAFF WRITER

At the tender age of 15, Stacy Potrykus has already seen more of the world than many adults.

Last year, she went to France with a school exchange; this summer, she made her second trip to Europe to serve as a soccer ambassador. Stacy was one of five players from Michigan to participate in the People to People Sports Ambassador program July 17-28.

"Someone nominated me," she said. "Then I had to get three recommendations from my coach and two other people."

She was also interviewed and had to explain how she feels about soccer. Since Stacy's been playing since the age of four, that part was pretty easy.

"I love playing," she said. "I play to win." Her parents, Bob and Debbie, signed her up 11 years ago without any thought that their daughter would one day be learning from professional soccer players in Germany. Bob coached his daughter until she turned 12 and joined a premier team in Berkeley.

Now, Stacy plays year 'round, as well as for the Harrison Hawks during the school year. From her trip, she brought back a few different moves and drills learned while working with professional Dutch players.

She played against different teams during a tournament in Holland, for which teams were picked by People to People coaches. Over two days, Stacy participated in four games, playing defense, which was new to her.

"My team did good. We were 2-1-1," she said. In addition to training and playing, the group got to tour Anne Frank's house, cruised the Rhine River and did a lot of shopping. Some parents went along as chaperones, and one player's mother coached Stacy's team.

"I knew absolutely no one," Stacy said, adding she connected with the other girls via e-mail



BILL BREMER/OBSERVER

Stacy Potrykus served as a People to People Ambassador this summer. Also pictured are family members Jennifer, 12, Laura, 5, mother Debbie, Bobby, 10, and father Bob. Sisters Chelsea, 8, and Lisa, 13, were at soccer practice.

before the trip.

While she was brave about flying, even after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Stacy admitted she got "the jitters" about two weeks before the trip. Her mom wasn't all that crazy about sending her oldest daughter overseas this summer.

"Deep down inside, I was thinking about everything that's happening," Debbie said. "But she's a strong girl, and I want her to do an experience everything she can, so long as we can afford it."

Most of Stacy's five younger siblings play soccer. Lisa, 13, is a goalie and the sisters often play off each other in the neighborhood, with Stacy practicing her offense moves. Bobby, 10, Chelsea, 8 and Laura, 5, all spend their summers on the soccer field. Jenny, 12, plays the piano. Stacy plans to continue playing soccer through high school and into her college years.

"I just really enjoy playing," she said. "I play to win. It's like in my blood."

# Thieves take couple's money, not their spirit

BY JONI HUBBED  
STAFF WRITER

The thieves moved so fast, Holly and Mark McConnell didn't realize what was happening until their money was gone.

Now the owners of For Pet's Sake, who make and sell dog accessories at area craft shows, have lost thousands of dollars and more than 65 special orders. Worse yet, credit card slips with customers' names, addresses and signatures are gone. Many of the folks potentially affected live in the Oakland and Wayne County area.

The McConnells have spent the past seven years building their business, with the help of their three Golden Retrievers. They tour festivals all around the state and had spent weeks preparing for the biggest of them all: Arts, Beats and Eats in Pontiac Labor Day weekend.

"We saved for a month to have the inventory ready," Holly said. "This was the biggest show of our lifetime. They had a million people there."

Over the years, the couple had

developed what they felt was a very secure way to handle the cash, checks and credit card receipts they collected. As was their custom, on Sunday they wore funny packs, and when those filled they'd empty it all into a bag placed inside a bucket underneath a table, at their feet.

Two well dressed people walked up to their booth that afternoon. They raised absolutely no suspicion and seemed interested in the couple's wares and Brandy, one of the McConnells' pets.

"Obviously, these people had been watching us all weekend," Holly said. "One person pulled me over to the leashes and collars. The other was around our dog."

Mark seemed to sense something wasn't quite right; he thought someone might be after Brandy. Neither of them saw the third person hanging around the side of their booth until it was too late. The thief darted into the booth, went directly for the bag and was gone in a matter of seconds. The other two people ran off into the crowd, in what

appeared to be a well-orchestrated escape. The McConnells were stunned first, then devastated. They still had to get through the rest of Sunday and Monday.

"I couldn't do it," Holly said. "You have to open your heart to people, and I couldn't do it."

The McConnells also had to decide whether they wanted to continue with their business. They decided they weren't going to allow three people to take away something they'd worked seven years to build.

The cash loss set them back; they may have to borrow in order to get the supplies they need to build an inventory. The proceeds from Arts, Beats and Eats were supposed to get them through the winter.

Anyone who ordered custom pet accessories from For Pet's Sake at Arts, Beats and Eats is asked to contact the McConnells at (313) 870-0072. Also, anyone who paid for goods there with a check or credit card should contact their credit card company and major credit bureaus, to protect themselves against identity theft.

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