

It Takes Two

Siblings bring Truth to community

By Risa G. Merl

Katie Masters, 20, is the organized overachiever, valedictorian, and community service expert. Kyle Masters, 16, is the laid-back athlete, musician, and persuasive public speaker. In many ways, this pair is as different as siblings can be, but one parallel between the two is their strong individual roles as leaders in the community and beyond.

Both have been extremely active with SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco) in St. Johns County since the organization's beginning. "Smoking was something that I cared about because it affected many of the people that I loved. SWAT gave me the chance to do something about it," Katie says.

With a family history filled with smokers, Katie, a **University of Florida** student, thought it was very important to get her younger brother involved. Kyle, who attends **Pedro Menendez High School** in St. Augustine, says he probably wouldn't have gotten involved with SWAT if it hadn't been for his sister and most likely wouldn't have taken such a large leadership role.

Kyle gives credit to his sister for serving as an example for him over the years, one to learn from as he develops his own skills as a leader. "I didn't do things exactly the same [as Katie], but I don't think I'd be such a leader if she wasn't a leader when she was younger," Kyle says. Katie thinks that her coming first has set an example for her brother in some way, but she has also learned much from him. "We tried things, things that worked, things that were great, and things that didn't work, too. And then he came along with totally different ideas! So it's been really neat to watch," Katie says.

Both say they have very different styles when it comes to leadership. "I was always super-organized and knew when everything was and when I had to be where and I planned out my time exactly," Katie says. "Kyle is more laid-back. He does what he needs to do, but it's on his own schedule." But what Kyle might lack in organization, he makes up for with his persuasive prowess. According to Katie, Kyle got the political style and personality in the family. "He can get up and be charming and people will listen to him more," Katie says. "We see it all the time. He can get up and be completely persuasive, and he's a really effective speaker."

Katie and Kyle acknowledge that a large obstacle in their leadership careers has simply been their ages. Kyle is the first student to be a co-chairman of the Tobacco-Free Partnership, which serves as a partnership

between the community leaders and SWAT to decide what to do on a larger level about tobacco prevention. Kyle says that just being young can be an intimidating experience for high school leaders. "Everybody always questions your authority on issues when you're the ones in charge, and people, especially adults, don't always recognize that you're in charge," he says. Katie agrees that sometimes being young can be

a problem. "SWAT is made up of young people who are in high school or middle school. We get out and do things, and we don't know whether adults are intimidated by us or if they just don't take us seriously," she says.

Their ambitions in high school differ as much as their leadership styles. Besides working toward being valedictorian and having an unflinching dedication to SWAT, Katie was very involved in community service throughout high school, volunteering for programs such as "Learn to Read" and holding down a part-time job. Kyle, on the other hand, is involved in music and athletics, apart from his time working with SWAT and the Partnership.

Katie also admires her brother's stress-free style and says she has learned much from his more laid-back approach to leadership. "I would get very uptight about things and worry myself crazy," she says. "And he's so much more relaxed and still gets everything done." She claims that her brother's style has taught her that sometimes the best thing to do to get a job done is to just relax and have fun with it.

Their advice to up-and-coming leaders? "Be organized," Kyle says. "Definitely prioritize your events." Katie says that organization is important but claims that, on top of that, a leader must be assertive. "Don't be afraid to talk to people, make yourself clear, because if you act like a little kid, and you talk to people like you are goofy, they're going to treat you that way," she says. "But if you're assertive and you say what you mean to say, people will take you seriously."

While they've both learned from and taught each other much, they say the greatest advantage in working together has been in becoming closer. "When we were little, we never did anything together because we were in different age groups and into different things," Katie says. When they both started in SWAT, Katie was in high school and Kyle was in middle school, but they still worked on projects together. "I got to know him a lot better, and I really appreciate that," Katie says. Now, they have many mutual friends. "It's really nice to be able to go out in a group and have him along and not feel like, 'Katie, you brought your little brother?'" she says.

Together, these siblings have strived to not only serve as excellent leaders in their community but also to spread SWAT's message.

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UF's Katie Masters and Pedro Menendez High's Kyle Masters are fired-up about SWAT.



Learn more about the Masters siblings as well as SWAT leadership opportunities at www.floridaleader.com