

Honored for going extra mile

Sumwalt, Nielsen
earn prestigious
Dellecave Awards

BY MIKE RUIZ

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Ava Lily Sumwalt is well-known for her athletic prowess, particularly on the lacrosse field and in indoor track, but on Sunday morning, she was recognized for far more.

The Riverhead star and Hauppauge state champion swimmer Jake Nielsen were named winners of Newsday's 2022 Butch Dellecave Awards as Suffolk's top female and male scholar-athletes at Villa Lombardi's in Holbrook.

"I think this is awesome and a great thing to get an award for, with everything I've worked for and done in the community," said Sumwalt, who also was a member of the field hockey team. "I think it just represents who I am, and it's so great."

Nielsen was equally elated to receive such high recognition for his myriad accomplishments.

"I was super-excited when I heard I was nominated for this," he said. "I felt proud of myself because I put in a lot of work this year and feel like I earned it. To win this award based on both my academic and athletic achievements is such a cool thing."

Dellecave, who served as an educator at Connetquot for 30 years, was a sports official in the county for nearly 20 years and founded the Suffolk Sports Hall of Fame in 1990.

Other candidates for the county's prestigious honor spanned 52 schools and included Eastport-South Manor's Jake DesLauriers, Mount Sinai's Joey Spallina, Glenn's Sofia Condrone, Floyd's Alanis Gonzalez and Smithtown East's Julia Sue Kam Ling.

In addition to recording a total of 100 points for the girls lacrosse team this spring with 75 goals and 25 assists and previously qualifying for the New Balance Track and Field Indoor Nationals, Sumwalt was exceptional in the classroom with a 105.10 weighted GPA. She ranked 12th in her class.

She will attend the Univer-



Hauppauge's Jake Nielsen and Riverhead's Ava Lily Sumwalt won Dellecave Awards, given to Suffolk's top male and female scholar-athletes.

sity of Pittsburgh and is committed to the lacrosse program. Though currently undecided on a major, Sumwalt is leaning toward studying exercise science. She is considering a career as either a physician's assistant or a physical therapist.

Sumwalt also is well-regarded for her work within the community, which included time working as a lifeguard and helping to coordinate a Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation One Walk 5k for three years in honor of her younger brother, Miller. The events raised a total of more than \$20,000.

Riverhead girls lacrosse coach Lindsay Rella highlighted what makes Sumwalt such a remarkable leader on

various levels. "She's such a special kid," Rella said. "Both athletically, academically and as a person. I think she encompasses exactly what the Dellecave Award represents."

"She's a three-sport athlete and a leader on every team. She just embraces that role . . . She just makes sure that it's not all about her."

Nielsen also was a standout, both in the pool for the Hauppauge boys swimming team and in the classroom with a 3.5 GPA.

After joining the varsity team in eighth grade, Nielsen qualified for the state championships as part of relay teams during his freshman and sophomore seasons. He earned his first opportunity to compete

for an individual state title this past season and placed first in the 50 freestyle in an All-American consideration time of 20.68 seconds at Ithaca College on March 5, 0.26 seconds ahead of second place.

"I saw that I had a chance at winning and began to work really hard on it and was able to win," said Nielsen, who also competed in cross country for two seasons. "I was very proud of myself and felt very accomplished."

Hauppauge swimming coach Rich Lionetti said Nielsen's heightened focus entering his senior season was apparent from the outset.

"To receive the Dellecave Award is a prestigious honor for any athlete," Lionetti said. "Jake worked so hard in the off-

season leading into his senior year. He had a different mindset and it showed. It paid off for him in being able to win the state championship. He also buckled down with his schoolwork, and this is so exciting."

Nielsen will attend SUNY Geneseo. He is undecided on a major but said he might study math or science with potential aspirations of becoming a teacher.

One of Nielsen's proudest accomplishments in the community is the time he has spent volunteering to help with kindergarten students who have special needs.

"I put a lot of hours into that," he said, "and feel like I made a real impact on their lives."