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SOUTHSIDE NOTES: Music a family affair for Kent, Katie Smedley

By Susan D. Brandenburg
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Ten-year-old Kaitie Smedley accompanied her dad, Southside musician Kent Smedley, to a gig at the annual Christmas Tea of the National League of American Pen Women Dec. 9. While her dad entertained the gathering of professional women of the arts, letters and music, Kaitie mingled and fit right in as a budding musician in her own right.

A fifth-grader at St. Paul's Catholic School in Riverside, Kaitie has played violin with the Jacksonville Youth Symphony Orchestra for three years, is in the fifth-grade chorus at school and is an award-winning gymnast.

"Kaitie's a born performer," said her dad. "She just hasn't decided on her arena yet."

And, speaking of performers, classically trained guitarist Kent Smedley performed some of his inspiring original music at the tea, as well as traditional holiday tunes.

A recording artist and member of the former hard rock band Prodigy, Smedley's new and "softer" style is reflected in his latest CD, *Whispered Dreams*. Recently, after 18 years of teaching guitar lessons at a Mandarin location, Smedley opened his own studio closer to home.

"The Teaching Studio is in Lakewood, right down the street from our house," he said. "Kaitie can ride over on her bike after school, and, I'm glad to say, my students have followed me to the Southside."

Smedley can be reached at 739-9356 or www.kentsmedley.com.

Victims support group

Billie Sterner of San Marco prays the holiday season will be joyous and accident-free for everyone, but, she notes, sometimes the holidays can be the deadliest time of year on the highways.

She wants to let people know that if a fatal accident does occur, her support group, Victims and Victims, will be there for them.

Sterner killed a man in March 2004. "I took his breath away when his motorcycle hit my car, and it still haunts me."

Following a year of deep depression, Sterner and her sister, Janis Roberts, started the Victims and Victims Support Group.

"For a long time, until God put the support group in my heart, I felt there was no one out there who could understand the emotions and heartache I was experiencing," said Sterner. "How do you mourn a man you never even met?"

Through the Victims and Victims Support Group, survivors of similar accidents are helping each other cope with those emotions and begin the healing process. Victims and Victims Support Group meets the third Wednesday of each month at the Balis Community Center in the Southside Branch of the

Jacksonville Public Library.

For information, call Sterner at 393-9090 or 504-4742.

Ramp It Up

A group of Southside Realtors labored all day Nov. 29, building a wheelchair ramp at the Northside home of 83-year-old John Ziemba.

It was the 30th ramp built in 2006 by the Ramp It Up, a partnership between the Northeast Florida Association of Realtors and the Housing Partnership of Northeast Florida, both headquartered on the Southside.

Volunteers on the Ziemba ramp build were Eric Sommers of HomeBanc Mortgage; Linda McInnis, Sandy Holdren, Dot Perry and Willie Perry of Realty Executives; Kay Seitzinger, Elizabeth Callander, Mike Neely and Matt Zimmerman of Watson Realty; and Sean Watts and Bill Jorgenson of the Housing Partnership.

"We set a goal of 30 ramps this year and we made it," said Holdren, the association's 2006 Community Affairs Task Force Chair.

Ziemba, who uses a wheelchair, sat in the doorway of his new mobile home with his wife, Maritza, eagerly watching them build the ramp, Holdren said.

"He kept saying 'You're giving me my freedom,' " Holdren said.

For information on Ramp It Up and the services provided by the Housing Partnership of Northeast Florida, visit www.thehousingpartnership.com.

Send Southside news and events to Susan D. Brandenburg at susand1@bellsouth.net, or to Susan D. Brandenburg, c/o Heather Lovejoy, Community News, The Florida Times-Union, P.O. Box 1949, Jacksonville, FL 32231, fax 359-4478. Information must be received at least 10 days prior to an event.