

SOUTH STRAND NEWS

Making a difference: Georgetown native mentors youth, receives national award

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Denise Chapman holds the award she received for being named the national S.A.V.E. Advisor of the Year.

Georgetown native Denise Chapman has spent a good portion of her adult life establishing education, mentoring and prevention programs for the children of Georgetown County, and on April 1, her efforts were recognized when she was named the National Students Against Violence Everywhere Advisor of the Year.

The award was presented to Chapman during the S.A.V.E. National Youth Summit conference which took place March 31–April 1 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Chapman received her honor for outstanding dedication to youth safety and exemplifying the ideals of S.A.V.E.

"I am still over the moon excited about receiving the award," Chapman said. "This award may have my name on it, but it belongs to all the kids that are a part of the S.A.V.E. organization. ...

"The kids in the programs that I organize and put together are what drives me to make sure that Georgetown is the best place it can be for our kids, and that our kids are the best kids that they can be when they are representing Georgetown."

Chapman grew up in Georgetown and graduated from Howard High School. She has a master's of arts degree in clinical counseling, a bachelor of arts in sociology and she is a certified parenting facilitator.

Chapman said she has been working with and beside the youth of Georgetown County for more than 20 years.

"I wanted to be an intervention specialist in the schools after I obtained my degrees," Chapman said. "But that position didn't exist in the district, so I had to come up with another way to try and mentor to middle and high school students. ...

"So I founded Unity Community Youth Group, and from there, I founded Optimism Preventive Services, and out of O.P.S. we launched a S.A.V.E. chapter."

Chapman said it was very important to establish a S.A.V.E. chapter in Georgetown because the organization is operated by students.

"S.A.V.E. is a unique and powerful approach to youth safety because it recognizes the role that young people can take in making schools and communities safer," she said. The opportunity to spread the message of nonviolence to young people and their communities is enhanced when S.A.V.E. chapters exist. ...

"Focusing on crime prevention, conflict management and service projects, S.A.V.E. students are providing positive peer influences in violence prevention efforts."

Eighteen students from the Georgetown S.A.V.E. accompanied Chapman to the national summit this year and they presented a program on "Social Media – The Ugly Truth."

"I have never been so proud of our little group than I was in Raleigh this year," Chapman said. "They had the entire audience captivated when they gave their presentation. Students, teachers, adults, parents, advisors – you name it, they were hanging on to every word that our kids had to say."

The group's presentation, Chapman said, focused on cyber bullying, slang language used in cyber bullying, sexting and social media addiction.

"No child wants to admit they are addicted to social media and no parent wants to admit their child is hooked on it," Chapman said. "But this group from Georgetown opened the eyes of everyone from across the nation that attended the summit and they had an impact on the lives of others, and that's exactly what they have been taught to do. ...

"They are making a difference in the community where they live, they are making a difference in the lives of children and parents across the country and the lessons they are learning will stick with them for life."

Jordan German is a member of the local S.A.V.E. chapter and she is also a member of the national organization's youth advisory board.

"Being a part of S.A.V.E. empowers us in many different ways," German said. "Last year we won the chapter of the year for the entire country, and it made us just want to come back to Georgetown and do more. ...

"I think our presentation on social media will be empowering to other youth and they will think about the dangers that social media can present and they will think twice before they post something inappropriate or get themselves in a dangerous situation. We are teaching other what we learn when we meet with Miss Denise (Chapman) and our other adult mentors during our S.A.V.E. meetings and events."

Chapman said children need to realize that the world is a better place because they are in it.

"Understanding the importance of a personal contribution can serve as a source of purpose and motivation," she said. "To see these students from Georgetown stand before a group that has come together from all over our country and be leaders was heartwarming. ...

"I watched them exude confidence in their presentation and I watched them lead in their small group activities and that in itself was an award to me."