

Desiree Williams

New philanthropy event close to student's heart

Katy Volikas has been coloring and painting since she was four years old. For her, it wasn't just a hobby. It was how she expressed herself.

Volikas, a sophomore international and political science major, grew up constantly clinging to her mother's side. She slept through the night, even when loud noises interrupted the silence. Volikas said she rarely understood what was happening around her, but no one knew it was because she couldn't hear.

After taking a preschool placement test, teachers suggested that Volikas attend a school for the mentally disabled.

"They mistook my inability to understand them with not knowing how to answer," Volikas said.

Volikas' mother took her to a doctor for a second opinion where she was diagnosed with malformed and deteriorating eardrums. The diagnosis resulted in a bilateral myringotomy surgery where the surgeon makes incisions in the patient's eardrums to remove fluid and places in ear tubes.

"Ear tubes are common for children who have chronic ear infections, but my situation was more serious because the combination of issues caused hearing loss and balance challenges," Volikas said.

Volikas dealt with a speech impediment after the surgery as well, so she tended to stay inside and color because it was difficult to communicate with others. Her talent grew so much that birthdays and holidays ended with new art supplies.

"I spent most of my childhood observing and finding details since I couldn't hear," Volikas said. "I truly believe the time I spent hearing impaired helped me tap into my right-brain and train my eyes while drawing."

Now Volikas has the opportunity to help others with impaired hearing. When Volikas came to Ball State, she went through greek recruitment. She wasn't sure which sorority she wanted until she heard Delta Zeta talk about their philanthropy which supports the Starkey Hearing Foundation.

Volikas said Delta Zeta has raised over \$8,000 so far this year for the foundation, which they are hoping will increase as they approach their philanthropy event. Hockey for Hearing is a new event this year which will take place in Ball Gym on April 24. All proceeds will be donated to the Starkey Hearing Foundation.

Volikas said Delta Zeta has also pledged to raise \$5,000,000 over the next five years to donate to the foundation.

"After watching a video about how Delta Zeta helped children in other countries receive hearing aids, I had "that feeling" everyone talks about and my decision was easy," she said.

"Growing up hearing impaired makes raising money for a hearing foundation close to my heart," she said.

Volikas has continued to work on her drawing and painting skills while in school. She launched her own website two years ago and has gathered a private client base in San Francisco. Volikas is working to build up a body of works, mostly photorealistic portraits, to sell to galleries or online, all in hopes of having her own show one day.

"When I make photorealistic pieces, I will zone out for hours that feel like minutes, and it's the one time when I can't hear anything again," she said.