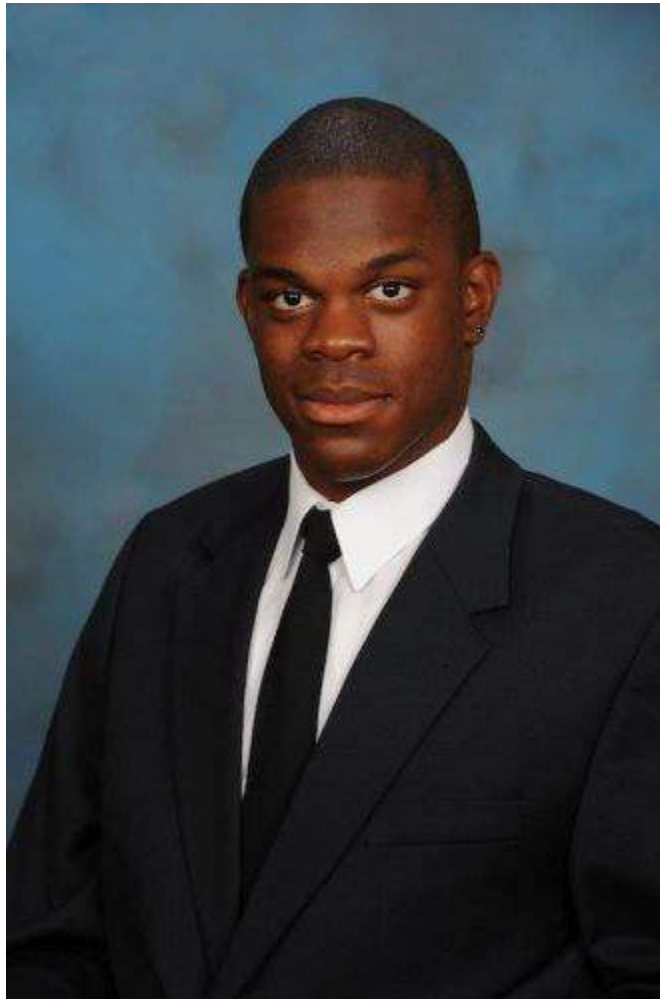


Learning disability can't deter Center Academy student from perfect attendance

- By Eric Vician, Times Correspondent

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Darius Way, 19, will attend Beacon College in Leesburg.

GIBSONTON — Darius Way had never missed a day of school when an illness threatened to ruin his perfect attendance streak in the ninth grade. His mom, Karen, recalls a night of restlessness that saw her son finally fall asleep at 5 a.m.

When his alarm went off an hour later, he awoke and started preparing for another school day, much to his mother's amazement. He made it through that day without becoming sick and three years later that tenacity paid off.

Way graduated from high school last week with nary a truant blemish.

"When he sets his mind to something, he just does it," Karen said.

Making the accomplishment all the more striking is that Darius overcame attention deficit hyperactivity disorder while enduring Asperger's syndrome to graduate from Riverview's Center Academy with a 3.0 GPA and earn a partial scholarship to Beacon College in Leesburg.

He played basketball and flag football, served as a student government representative and worked on the yearbook staff. He wants to major in human services.

The Plant City resident holds a blue belt in karate, plays in the US Youth Soccer TOPSoccer program at Brandon's West Florida Flames club and describes himself as "cool, respectful and gentle."

"In Darius' case, he was very focused on his work," said Vince Brady, his teacher for the past two years at Center Academy, a private school of 105 fourth- to 12th-graders with mild to moderate disabilities. "He never stops producing quality work."

Way's mother, a surgical technologist in Riverview, said she still needs help funding Darius' \$22,000 college bill, but she remains a proud mom.

"It's a very happy feeling," Karen said. "I am really blessed to see him work very hard."

Dave Stone, the Center Academy director, said Way exemplifies the school's ability to not let students with mild to moderate disabilities fall through the cracks.

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