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He found a friend

Autistic boy forms bond with Cascade High football player



MARK MULLIGAN / THE HERALD

Cascade High School senior Steven Gallardo takes the hand of 11-year-old Lucas Jauregui after the Bruins' game at Everett Memorial Stadium on Friday night. The pair are part of the Bruin Buddy program that matches players with younger students. Lucas' mom, Sue Jauregui (right) was initially not sure if her son, who is autistic, would be able to participate in the program but Lucas has formed a special bond with Gallardo.

By ERIC STEVICK
Herald Writer

By any measure, Steven Gallardo played an impressive football game against rival Jackson High last Friday night.

The Cascade High School senior caught seven passes for 75 yards and a touchdown.

He made 11 tackles, sacked the quarterback and blocked an extra point.

Yet to one Everett family, his most meaningful feat happened after the final whistle on the rain-soaked turf of Everett Memorial Stadium.

To the casual observer, it might have seemed a simple act. Gallardo reached out his hand to Lucas Jauregui, 11, who gleefully grabbed it. The pair walked off the field together, winding their way up the steps to the locker room.

To appreciate the moment is to understand the bond that has slowly formed this fall between the strapping team captain and the autistic boy.

It is to venture back to the Cascade practice field in mid-August when they first met.

First-year coach Joe Cronin was determined to restore the sense of school pride that once marked Cascade football. Part of that tradition was a once-vibrant, lately dormant Bruin Buddies program that matched football players with elementary school students.

The coach decided to bring back the Bruin Buddies. Lucas and Gallardo were paired up and introduced on the field.

Lucas, who speaks only a few words, was leery as he was introduced to the towering teen. He cowered, sinking in his shoulders, scrunching up his body, trying to be small, almost invisible. He turned his back, averted his eyes and picked at blades of grass.

Gallardo tried to talk to him, but there

were no signs of a connection.

Nearby, Lucas' mom witnessed the awkwardly painful first encounter.

Sue Jauregui knew it had been a gamble to bring Lucas. She told Gallardo she would understand if he didn't want to continue.

Gallardo felt inadequate. While his teammates struck up quick conversations with their Bruin Buddies, including Lucas' younger brother Max, the sincere young man with a 3.95 grade-point average felt stumped. Lucas was much more difficult to solve than a trigonometry problem.

They were inches apart, but, in many ways, Lucas was in another universe.

Sue Jauregui first learned about the Bruin Buddy program from a flier she fished out of Max's backpack.

It seemed like a wonderful opportunity for

See **LUCAS**, Page A7

By NOAH HAGLUND
Herald Writer

EVERETT — Neither June Robinson or Scott Bader wants to be running for the Everett City Council this year.

That's not for lack of civic enthusiasm.

It's because they're competing for the spot left vacant this spring when City Councilman Drew Nielsen died in a rafting accident.

Robinson, who works in public health management, said she's the best candidate to continue Nielsen's thoughtful approach of carefully listening and encouraging people's involvement in city government. She said she entered the

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ELECTION 2012 | Everett
City Council, Position 5

Robinson, Bader vie for Nielsen's former seat

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the buzz

That stinks

A mom says she and her ill 1-year-old son were kicked off a Seattle Metro bus — on the way to the doctor's office, no less — because of the diarrhea-stricken baby's stinky diaper (Page B2).

Gee, The Buzz thought Seattle buses always smelled like that.

Speaking of gas pain: Gas prices will fall by up to 15

cents per gallon per week over the next month, oil industry analysts say (Page F1).

This is excellent news for us drivers — to say nothing of the bill collectors we've been stiffing so we can afford to fill our gas tanks.

If you have to ask, you can't afford it: Madonna's got her Beverly Hills mansion on the market for \$28 million, but don't bother looking for it on the Multiple Listing

Service — she's one of the rich and famous people using a top-secret, rich-folks-only real estate service to sell their properties away from the prying eyes of the 99 percent (Page F1).

Other than that, it's just like any other real estate agency. Oh, except for the gold blazers that are gilded with actual gold leaf.

— Mark Carlson,
Herald staff



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DAILY



Lucas

From Page A1

her youngest child, who entered the fourth grade this fall.

Then she thought about Lucas and the sadness she sensed whenever he saw Max dressed up in his Cub Scout uniform getting ready to go somewhere special, while he had to stay at home.

Jauregui figured it couldn't hurt to ask, even if Lucas technically didn't qualify because he was beginning middle school.

She made her pitch by phone to Don Jensen, a retired Cascade counselor who along with retired Cascade teacher Mike Therrell had volunteered to try to resurrect the Bruin Buddies program.

Jensen was a friendly voice on the other end of the line. He knew as a counselor and as the father of two grown children who graduated from Cascade that the Bruin Buddies program could make a big difference in young people's lives.

Jensen said he would ask Coach Cronin.

Both agreed that if it was going to work, they would need the right match, someone with compassion who could deal gracefully with unforeseen challenges.

Cronin immediately thought of Gallardo.

During that first meeting in August, Lucas' mom and Gallardo salvaged slivers of hope.

For Sue Jauregui, it was a fleeting moment when Lucas glanced her way.

"He was almost smiling," she said. "It was almost as if he was saying, 'Look at me, Mom. I'm with the big kids. I'm doing what they are doing.'"

For Gallardo, the moment came when the players and their new-found buddies were reciting the Bruin whisper, a barely audible chant that grew louder and louder. Gallardo couldn't tell if Lucas was annoyed or intrigued, but he did clap his thighs to the beat.

He knew then there was someone inside. He just had to figure out how to reach him.

Gallardo began finding parallels between his football team and his Bruin Buddy.

He was promoted to the varsity squad toward the end of his freshman year. Between then and the end of his junior year, the team didn't win a single game.

Last summer, the team gathered for a Bruin Brotherhood camp. They defined themes. One was dedication, that no matter what the score was on the field, they

would not give up.

He adopted that mindset with Lucas.

"I knew I needed to be there for Lucas," he said. "There is a competitor in me. I didn't want to give up on him just because it's hard. He deserves better."

After the Bruins' first game, he greeted Lucas on the field.

While the other players walked side by side with their Bruin Buddies, Lucas trailed behind Gallardo to the locker room, holding on tight to his mother's hand.

In the locker room, Gallardo offered the boy a chocolate chip cookie and Lucas took it.

After the second home game, they met again on the field.

This time, Lucas let go of his mom's hand and walked alongside his Bruin Buddy. In the locker room, he seemed intrigued by the notion of a High 5 or knuckle bump offered by the coaches, at first pulling back and later accepting contact.

After the third home game, Lucas was eager to get down to the field.

"He gave me the go-away gesture and went and grabbed Steven's hand," said John Jauregui, Lucas' dad. "It was almost like we were watching him unfold. I got to see another layer of my son."

Before the national anthem at the fourth game, something

remarkable happened when Steven greeted Lucas to walk with him onto the field.

Lucas said, "Hi."

"I almost burst out crying," his mother said.

Lucas rarely speaks. He is a child with all sorts of idiosyncrasies.

He clicks his tongue and makes odd sounds. He's been known to pull out the laces of all his family's shoes. He obsesses over leaves. He'll twirl one by the stem, find pleasure in its crinkly texture and eventually pull it apart.

Sometimes it seems Lucas wants to reach the sky, staring at its vastness for long stretches of time.

It seems everyone has gained something from this special-needs child enrolled in the Bruin Buddies program.

Lucas emboldened his parents to lead him into the chaos that can be a high school football game. He's most comfortable on the periphery, in a section far removed from the brass and booming drums of the marching band, a place where he can run atop the metal bleachers without bothering anyone.

Lucas also has helped his fellow little buddies learn that it's OK that a child who can look so normal can be so different. Sue

Jauregui patiently answers the blunt questions of children who have unrefined social filters, peeling away some of the mystery to the developmental disorder that is autism.

For Don Jensen, the retired counselor, working with Lucas and the 29 other little Bruin Buddies has been therapeutic. His son, Brett, was a Bruin Buddy, as well as a straight-A student at Cascade. He died May 7, 2002, in a fall from a balcony at his fraternity house near the University of Washington. The 19-year-old freshman was an inexperienced drinker.

"I think Brett would like that we are carrying it on," Jensen said.

Bruin Buddies reminds Coach Cronin that high school football is more than winning or losing. It's about shaping the lives of young people, including someone with the pervasive challenges of Lucas.

For Gallardo, Lucas has been a window into the souls of his teammates. He's seen how much they care. One teammate already has called dibs on Lucas for next season after Gallardo graduates.

Lucas' mother offers the words he cannot speak about the benefits of being a Bruin Buddy.

"He's so happy to have a friend," she said.

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Dr. Gina Cadena-Forney

Maternity Patient

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WOMEN ADVICE
ABOUT WHERE TO
HAVE A BABY.

AND THEN I TOOK IT.



Gina Cadena-Forney the mom isn't so different from Gina Cadena-Forney the doctor. She wanted to have her child at a hospital where the care and caring were second to none. She also wanted to be sure a Level III newborn intensive care unit would be standing by in case her baby needed some extra help. That's why she chose the Providence Pavilion for Women & Children in Everett. And the now-two-year-old Mateo is living proof she made an excellent choice. Go to RxProvidence.org and learn about other doctors who took their own medicine.

