

The

Spotlight*

Cailyn Wheaton



I was especially excited to talk to Cailyn and Sandi Wheaton, of LittleBIG Dog Treats. I met Cailyn and her mom at what they called their "favorite meeting spot" a funky little coffee shop in Mount Juliet. Cailyn was obviously embarrassed to talk to me even though she was encouraged by her mom. She used sign language to say she was S.H.Y. but then laughed when her mom pointed out she didn't think she was shy anymore. Over the course of the next hour and a half Cailyn slowly opened up, and I determined not only was she a beautiful young woman but she was also determined, intelligent, thoughtful, and extremely funny.

Before moving to Tennessee, the Wheaton family lived in Michigan, where Cailyn helped at a dog treat company. After moving to Tennessee, Cailyn, who also happens to have Down syndrome, struggled to set goals for what she wanted to do after she finished school. This went on for a few years, until she and her mom decided to spend some time making dog treats one day. Cailyn and Sandi stated they had so much fun, Sandi asked Cailyn if this was

something she would want to do as a job. Cailyn said yes!

Today, Cailyn not only just works for LittleBIG Dog Treats, she is also completely involved in the company and what it has become since before its official opening in January, 2016. For Cailyn, this company is perfect. She does something she loves, works with her mom, takes care of her dog, and meets new fur babies in the process.



Cailyn, at 22 years old, has been involved in every aspect of LittleBIG Dog Treats. She named the company, picked the colors and chose the extremely cute logo. It doesn't stop there, though. At this time LittleBIG Dog Treats is pretty much a one woman show, and Cailyn literally does it all from following the recipes, coming up with new treats, cutting and laying out treats for baking, bagging, labeling, setting up for sales, passing out information cards, meeting customers and their dogs and collecting the money for sales. It seems the only thing she does not do is taste test the treats - that is her dog Briley's job. Cailyn says Briley



loves his job way too much, because he tries to get in the way, and she now has to put gates on the doors to the kitchen! I think it just proves how great the treats actually are!

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LittleBIG Dog treats is growing quickly! According to Sandi, the company has grown to a point to where they will soon have to have a commercial kitchen in order to keep up with sales. Cailyn says the goal is to hire help, as it will soon be too much for just the two of them. They would like the person they hire to also have special needs.

Cailyn is not just the owner of LittleBIG Dog Treats, she has lots of things going on outside of the company. Sandi states since starting the business Cailyn's self-confidence and self-esteem has increased dramatically, and she has blossomed. Cailyn is active and involved in more things than ever before; she is part of the Queen B bowling team, participates in Bible study, involved in other activities at her church including greeting and cleaning with the coffee team and recently won a huge blue ribbon from the Association of State Fairs for her entry of a dog house made from her dog treats. Cailyn is also very proud of her nephews, Chase and Brody, which she talked about helping and spending lots of time with. Sandi and Cailyn state they are humbly grateful for the incredible support they have received from the community. When asked if there was anything she would like to share with everyone, Cailyn said, "I am proud of myself." I think everyone can agree, she has a lot to be proud of!

If you are interested in meeting Cailyn and Sandi you are likely to find them at one of the many Middle Tennessee Farmer's Markets including the East Nashville Farmer's Market, Richland Park West in Nashville, Vintage Market Days, Fiddler's Grove, Nashville Pet Expo, the Nashville Buddy Walk® and many, many others. For information or to buy some of their products from the comfort of home check out the website <http://littlebigdogtreats.com/>.



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Down Syndrome Association
of Middle Tennessee

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DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE WHO SHOULD BE IN THE DSAMT SPOTLIGHT?

Cailyn is receiving \$100 and a special gift for being our Spotlight focus! Do you know someone who wants to be our Spotlight of the Month?

Email a photo and a short explanation why to tanya@somethingextra.org.

Winning submissions will receive \$100
and a special gift!