

Student Suits Up a Speech and Debate Service Project



Improved communication, research, writing, and critical thinking skills are among the many valuable and well known academic benefits students derive from participating in speech and debate activities. Competitive forensics, as it is also known, also improves students' social skills such as conflict resolution, assertiveness, and the ability to listen to their peers. The benefits, however, extend beyond academic and personal growth. Students also value the opportunities to develop camaraderie, travel, compete, and wear professional business attire.

Jake Wallack, grade 11, with the help of his sister, Rachel Wallack, class of 2014, started *It Suits U* upon noticing that some students were not dressed as well as they could be while competing at speech and debate tournaments. Knowing that confidence is the key to success in

competition and that wearing the proper attire for competition should not be an obstacle to participation, Jake explains that "*It Suits U* collects and then distributes suits to kids who can't afford to buy one."

Students, with a passion for speech and debate, may become discouraged from competing upon realizing that buying a suit is not an option for their families. Jake explains, "I'm fortunate to be able to buy a suit, but not everyone can easily just go out and buy one." A fellow speech and debate competitor, Zenita Collie, senior and captain of the Nova High School debate and interp squad, added that "many can't afford suits, for a variety of circumstances, and risk being left out of participating in something they truly love doing." In an effort to help students who need a suit for speech and debate tournaments, Jake has been collecting suits for over a year and has over 120 suits, shirts, shoes, ties, and other accessories stored in his garage. With Rachel now away at college, Jake has actively continued to make suits available to any student who needs one at no cost.

Mikko Biana, sophomore at Nova High School and an *It Suits U* recipient, said "dressing up is such an important part to forensics, and judges do look at how you look." Mikko added that "wearing a suit gives you more confidence, and *It Suits U* has given me the opportunity to look nice and also do well competitively."

Students learn about *It Suits U* through their speech and debate coaches. Those young men and women who could benefit from a suit reach out to Jake directly and set up a time to get fitted. For the most part, students leave Jake's house with a ready to wear ensemble that often includes shoes too. Through this service project, Jake has made a lot of kids and parents happy.