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10-Year-Old Exceptional Minds Student with Autism Wins International Student Film Festival Hollywood (ISFFH) Award for Best Animated Short in Elementary Category

Sherman Oaks, Calif. – A 10-year-old boy who attends tutoring at Exceptional Minds vocational school for youth with autism became a winner for the second year in a row at the International Student Film Festival Hollywood (ISFFH) tonight, taking home first place for the Best Animated Short in the Elementary category.

Young “PK” Keith of Valley Village, California, who was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) at age two and whose budding interest in animation and film was evident at an early age, received an award from ISFFH in recognition of his animated short Animal Birthday Party on Sunday, November 18. The short was selected along with more than 65 others for screening at the ISFFH film festival, which took place November 17 and 18, 2012, at the Beverly Garland’s Theater in North Hollywood, California.

PK won the same category in last year’s ISFFH festival, an annual event open to all elementary, junior high and high school students that recognizes young filmmakers from around the world.

“Some people don’t know until after graduating from college what they want to do. PK has always wanted to be an animator. Even before he could talk, he’d go through reams and reams of paper, drawing and laying out his story boards on the floor. This is his thing,” says mom Mollie Burns Keith, who enrolled PK in private tutoring sessions at Exceptional Minds over the summer to develop her son’s skills and prepare him for eventual employment as an animator.

PK originated the Flash animation with tutoring and instruction from Laura Robinson and other instructors at Exceptional Minds, a vocational school located in Sherman Oaks, California, for young adults on the autism spectrum who are aspiring to become animators and computer artists. Started last year by professionals in the post-production and film industry, and instructed by working animators with
the help of experts experienced in autism developmental issues, Exceptional Minds is being lauded as the poster child for what’s next for young adults with ASD, many of whom are underemployed or unemployed yet demonstrate an aptitude for computer animation and technology in general.

“PK is one more example of what these young and talented individuals can do given the right tools, the right instruction and the space to do it,” says Yudi Bennett, the director of operations for Exceptional Minds, and the parent of a young adult on the autism spectrum.

The International Student Film Festival Hollywood is in its 10th year as a venue “where the next generation of filmmakers showcase their work,” placing PK Keith among an elite and esteemed group of young aspiring talent.

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