

Photo from Dori Rivers

Odessa resident Jacob Rivers, 11, met boxing legend Sugar Ray Leonard and other celebrities when he visited Washington, D.C., to promote diabetes research.

In the fight

Jacob Rivers travels to Washington, D.C., to promote diabetes research, gets to hang out with politicians and celebrities, and even meets the president. **STORY, PAGE 9**

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COVER STORY

Giving it his best shot



Photo from Dori Rivers

Jacob, father Tim and mother Dori, met U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-Palm Harbor, during their trip.

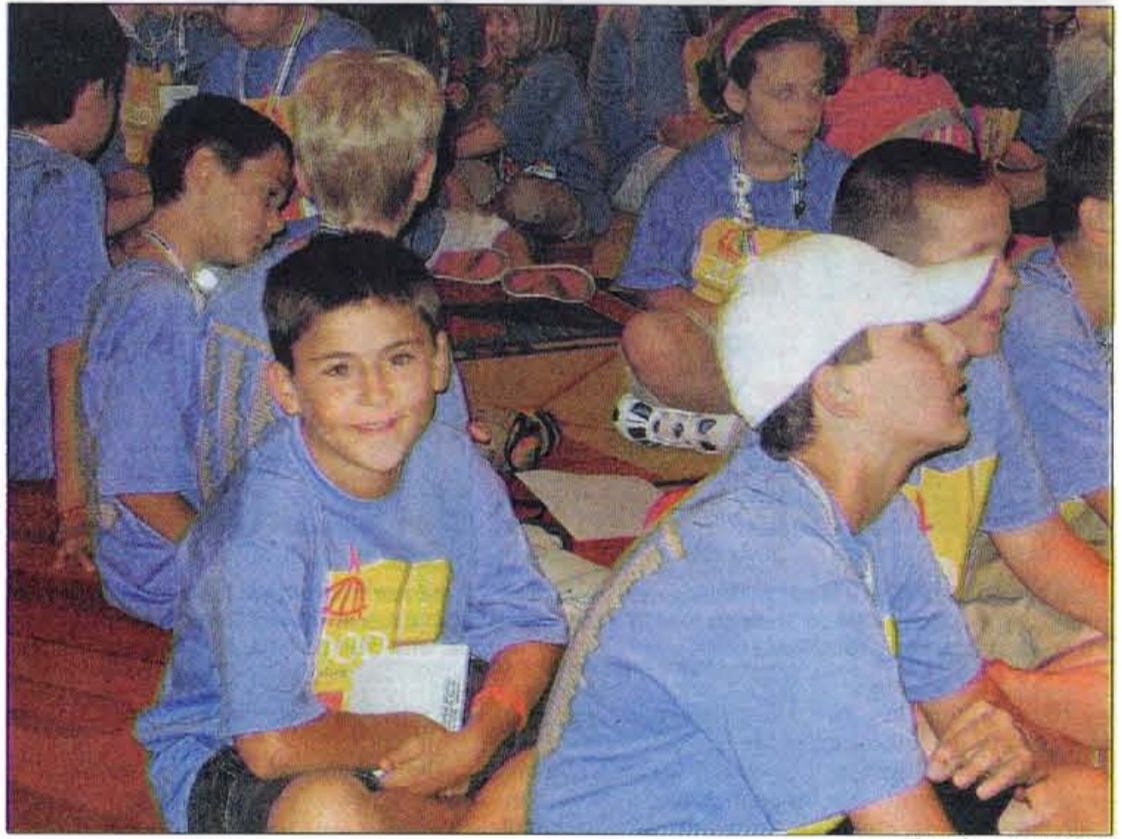


Photo from Dori Rivers

Jacob Rivers sits with other participants in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation's Children's Congress in June. The congress meets every other year in Washington to lobby for diabetes research.



Tribune file photo by JAY NOLAN

Taylor Moseley, left, Jacob and Ashkon Chamani walked at Hammond Elementary in April to help raise money for diabetes research.

"When you're doing it, you're not thinking about it. A few minutes later, you're like, 'Wow, I actually did it.'"

JACOB RIVERS

On meeting President Barack Obama

only a handful of youngsters dealing with it. It was interesting to hear their different experiences, he said.

Jacob's parents, Tim and Dori Rivers, are active in the Tampa Bay chapter of the juvenile diabetes foundation and accompanied him to Washington, taking turns as chaperone.

"We've been looking forward to this for so long, it's hard to believe we're here," Dori Rivers said from Washington.

Children's Congress kicked off with a banquet on June 22. The students expected to convene in Capitol Hill the next day and sing "Promise to Remember Me," a song about the

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Jacob Rivers attends a Children's Congress in Washington, D.C., to raise awareness of Type 1 diabetes.

By COURTNEY CAIRNS PASTOR
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Type 1 diabetes.

"It's a unique opportunity children have to meet with their leaders," said Jillian Lubarsky, a foundation spokeswoman.

Though the participants, ages 4 to 17, are too young to vote, the congress gives them access to important meetings and a chance to share their experiences with diabetes and push for more funding for research, Lubarsky said.

The children also hear from celebrities, who this year included Nick Jonas of the Jonas Brothers, Sugar Ray Leonard

and Mary Tyler Moore. It's nice for the students to see you can be an actor, singer, activist or athlete and be touched by diabetes, Lubarsky said.

More than 1,500 children applied to attend, Jacob, who was diagnosed with diabetes when he was 4, had to fill out an application and write a letter to U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-

Palm Harbor, to qualify. Six other children from Florida, ranging from elementary to high school students, also attended.

"It was really cool," said Jacob, 11. "It helped me a lot."

He couldn't believe how many students he met with diabetes during the conference, but he knew they represented

JACOB RIVERS

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I actually did it."

From there, the delegates attended a luncheon where Jacob met Leonard. They heard from a panel of musicians, doctors and athletes about how diabetes has affected them, and Jacob was selected to ask a question.

He asked Minnesota Vikings player Jared Allen, who is not diabetic, why he started his fundraising walk team, the "Marching Mullets." Jacob led a walk and fundraiser at Hammond Elementary in April.

Allen told him he was inspired after reading a letter a friend received from a child with diabetes.

The rest of the trip brought Jacob to Congress. The delegates sat in on

testimony on June 24 before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. Moore, Jonas and Leonard testified, as well as three students and a mother who has four children with diabetes.

Afterward, Jacob had a personal meeting with Bilirakis. He told him how hard it is to live with diabetes. He has worn an insulin pump since kindergarten and monitors his blood sugar, taking breaks from sports when he needs to if he gets light-headed or cannot focus.

Children's Congress started in 1999 and has met every other year.

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conference's theme, but learned instead they had a last-minute addition to their schedule — a meeting with President Barack Obama.

Parents could not attend but watched a video afterward, Dori Rivers said. Jacob got to shake Obama's hand.

"It was really cool that Jake got to do that," she said.

It didn't sink in until later that he had met the president.

"When you're doing it, you're not thinking about it," Jacob said. "A few minutes later, you're like, 'Wow,