

## Dana draws enthusiastic young fans

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With children following her every move, Olympic gold medal winner Dana Vollmer resembled the Pied Piper Monday. The 16-year-old Granbury High School student was part of the 4x200-meter relay that set a world record of 7:53.42 in Athens, Greece. But youngsters didn't care about all the details Monday.

They wanted their heroine to share a moment with them. They were thrilled to be sitting at her feet as she was honored by one dignitary after another at Granbury City Hall following a parade in her honor.

The loudest applause of the evening came when mayor David Southern announced the city pool would be renamed The Dana Vollmer Municipal Swim Center. Little hands were clapping as fast as they could make contact as a surprised Vollmer accepted the accolade.

"We couldn't think of anything to do in a better way to let everyone know how proud we are of our Olympian," Southern said.

Then, after the Granbury school song and fight song, it was off to sign autographs for Vollmer.

"This is the best part," Vollmer said as she signed autographs after the event. "Well, all of it was fun, but I really love kids. They are definitely the best part."

Vollmer stayed and signed autographs for every child in attendance who asked for one. She signed everything from T-shirts to a soft-drink bottle.

"I hope that's not considered an endorsement," Vollmer said, laughing.

"I love all the little kids, talking to them, getting to be with them," Vollmer said. "Their faces are so bright and happy."

Many of the several thousand in attendance Monday were children. They came from elementary schools all over the area to be in the parade and get close to Dana.

"This is cool," said 8-year-old Marley Carpenter, a third-grade student at Emma Roberson Elementary. "I get to be in a parade because of her. I'm going to be in SEALS next year. She's got me looking forward to it."

Vollmer swam with the SEALS from age 5 to 11. She now swims with the Fort Worth Area Swim Team, but can often be seen cheering on her former team at their meets.

Jonathan Sutton, 10, used to be a member of the SEALS. The Brawner fifth-grader said Vollmer's performance in Athens has him thinking about joining again. "It's very amazing," Sutton said. "I knew she'd do good, but this is amazing. When I saw her on TV, I started jumping up and down."

Vollmer isn't simply a heroine to children. Her peers at GHS are equally excited about what she's accomplished.

"It's nice for us to be able to do this for her since she did that for us," Daniel Forseca, 15, said. "I think this is the biggest thing to ever happen in Granbury."

Kellie Brandon, principal at Emma Roberson, is a former swimmer herself in high school in Colorado. Her specialty? Relays.

"I think it's great she did it (won gold) as part of a team," Brandon said, pointing to the Emma Roberson children in a trailer waiting anxiously to be pulled in the parade. "And we'll have more of this in the future. I've got a lot of little Olympians here."

The parade would not have been complete without the involvement of Baccus Elementary, where Dana's mother Cathy taught second grade for several years.

"I can tell you without a doubt my husband Jon and I watched [Dana] at age 5 and said, 'What do you think, 2004?'"



Granbury salutes Olympic champ Dana Vollmer with parade

Baccus second-grade teacher and longtime family friend Suzanne Back said. "She has such a natural talent. Baccus is real proud of her."

Some children did say they want to be in the Olympics like Dana someday. Others said they plan on watching Dana over the years as she competes in more Olympics.

And then there was 8-year-old Marina Stapleton, a third-grader at Emma Roberson. She was inspired by Vollmer, but for something other than sports.

"I don't swim, but I'm a pretty fast runner," Stapleton said. "But I don't want to be in the Olympics. I want to be a paleontologist and that would just get in the way. But I know I can get my dream."

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