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## Treasure makes unlikely return

Student returns girl's generosity

**By Crystal Ledford**

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Autumn McBride

Kayla Seiler is pictured in the letter she wrote to Stephanie Hamilton after finding Hamilton's class ring in Hilton Head, S.C. Seiler lives in Michigan.

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Among many people's most treasured items are their high school class rings.

Stephanie Hamilton, a senior at West Forsyth High School, was no exception

She toiled for months to raise enough money to buy her treasure.

"I worked two jobs to be able to pay for she said. "I worked [as a waitress] and did a bunch of baby sitting."

Like most high school upperclassmen s wore the ring at almost all times.

That wasn't a problem until spring brea last year, when she wore it into a swimming pool at a condo village in Hil Head, S.C.

"I was on the beach and I didn't feel it c my hand," she said. "I thought I had los on the beach. We looked and looked, b



Hilton Head.

While swimming one day, 11-year-old Kayla Seiler said she “saw something sparkly.”

“I was just looking around the bottom of the pool,” she said. “I’ve found a bunch of stuff, even some glass marbles, in the pool. [The ring] was just over in a corner.

“I saw something sparkly and tried to get to it before anyone else could.”

After retrieving it, Seiler said the family placed notes at the pool looking for the ring’s owner.

“We didn’t want to put it in lost and found because they throw stuff away,” she said.

After it went unclaimed while on their vacation, she took it home and “wore it everywhere.”

“I didn’t want to lose it because I wanted to find who it belonged to, and I thought wearing it would be the best way to not lose it,” she said.

Seiler said her entire family took turns trying to track down the ring’s owner, to no avail.

Confusion arose due to the ring’s engraving, which included just Hamilton’s first and middle name: Stephanie Lee.

But the Seilers thought Lee might be her last name.

Compounding matters was the fact that the ring didn’t have Hamilton’s school name on it. It featured only West’s wolverine mascot and a ribbon for breast cancer awareness.

“My aunt looked, really the whole family did,” Seiler said. “My older brother looked on Facebook, but there were a lot of Stephanie Lees out there.”

At one point, the family thought the ring might belong to a college student, since a wolverine is the mascot of several universities.

Contacting colleges led them nowhere either.

Finally, the Seilers enlisted the help of Peggy Schodowski, a family friend who runs a company specializing in business and personal research solutions.

Schodowski said she was able to find the ring’s owner in “about four phone calls and less than two

didn’t find it anywhere. I didn’t even think about it being in the pool.

“It was rough. I had only had it about a month when I lost it.”

The shiny bauble could have remained in the pool for years had it not been for a young girl from more than 700 miles away.

In April, the Seiler family of Clarkston, Mich., a northern suburb of Detroit, was vacationing at the same condo village in

hours.”

“The patent and copyright were on the ring,” she said. “Once I figured out the ‘BAL’ on the patent stood for Balfour, I was able to call Balfour and they were able to tell me who it belonged to pretty quickly.”

After months in Michigan, the ring made it’s way back to Forsyth County last week.

But there’s a twist.

Not long after she lost the first, Hamilton bought a replacement ring.

“Balfour has a one-year warranty, where if you lose it you can send them \$100 and they’ll replace it,” she said.

In the package with the original ring, Seiler included a nearly three-page letter to Hamilton.

“I basically told her the whole story and sent a list of all the people who helped find her,” she said

Hamilton was so touched by the letter she decided to return Seiler’s generosity.

Rather than keeping the original ring, which is also too large now, she mailed the ring back to the child.

“When I got her letter and read how much she loved the ring and how she took such good care of it, I knew I should send it back,” Hamilton said.

“I’d rather have someone keep it who loves it rather than it just sit in a box.”



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