

# Chronically ill Phoenix teen gets monster surprise at school

Diego Mendoza-Moyers, The Republic | azcentral.com 6:32 p.m. MT Feb. 2, 2017

*Scarlet Bandit and its driver, Dawn Creten, visit the 16-year-old Monster Jam fan at Cesar Chavez High*



(Photo: Hannah Gaber/The Republic)

As students poured out of classrooms and onto the concourse of Cesar Chavez High School during lunch Thursday, they were welcomed by the loud roar of pistons firing and an engine revving.

Out of the crowd came 16-year-old Lucy Sosa, who approached the noise found the Scarlet Bandit, a monster truck featured in the Monster Jam tour.

Lucy's calm demeanor belied her surprise after learning the truck and its driver, Dawn Creten, were at the south Phoenix school to see her, an avid Monster Jam fan.

"I didn't know if she was going to jump up and down, then I looked at her and I was like, 'No, she's like me.' We're just kind of subdued, excited inside," Creten said. "When we get calls that we're going to make someone's day special, can't wait to do that. Driving is secondary."

## Sick since childhood

Lucy has been in and out of hospitals since she was 9 years old, when she was told she had an undiagnosed case of strep throat for more than two years, according to a press release from Monster Jam about Lucy. Since then, her health has declined and she "now suffers from vascular and autoimmune diseases that attack her pancreas, liver, kidney and eyes," according to the release.

Being sick has changed her everyday life. Even going to the movies, one of Lucy's favorite things to do, can be difficult because of her medical needs, said Crystal Sosa, Lucy's mother.

"A lot of people just go to the movies, it's a not a big deal," Sosa said. "But when you have a kid who's sick and has to wear a mask, or you have to constantly get up to leave to give them injections or their pills, or whatever it is, turn off their pump. It is a big deal."

## 'Big secret'

Thursday's surprise was organized by Hope Kids, a nationwide organization that works with kids who have life-threatening illnesses by putting on events like this one, and providing a network of support for young people like Lucy and their families.

"We believe strongly that hope is powerful medicine," said Kimberly Trichel, executive director of Hope Kids AZ. "So we like giving these kids the hope and anticipation and something to look forward to, rather than their sick days and their medication and their treatment days."

"When we go with Hope Kids, you don't feel different," Lucy said. "Everyone's kind of the same. You don't feel different if you're wearing a mask or have a pump or anything."



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Dawn Creten (center) brought her monster truck Scarlet Bandit to surprise Lucy Sosa, 16, (left) a chronically ill student at Cesar Chavez High School in Phoenix. Lucy's mother, Crystal Sosa, and brother, Noah, joined them at the school Feb. 2, 2017. (Photo: Hannah Gaber/The Republic)

As she stood in the shadow of the Cesar Chavez High football stadium, Lucy, who has been to Monster Jam four times, said she had no idea the monster truck was coming to school. Her whole family knew and had to be careful to hide it from Lucy, her mother said.

"Everybody knew except her. I had to keep it a big secret; her cousins, her best friends knew."

"It's an amazing thing what people do when they realize that your daughter struggles with a lot of health issues, so this is amazing and I appreciate it so much," Sosa said, fighting back tears.

Lucy explained her love of Monster Jam this way:

"Every time I go to Monster Jam, I'm around my family and we all have a good time," Lucy said. "I just like all the loud noise, the intensity of it, of them crushing cars, riding on the dirt. Sometimes they flip, and there's the suspense of them tipping over or falling. You're like, 'Oh my god are they OK? Have they caught on fire?' But they're always OK and it's really cool."

Lucy is receiving 20 suite tickets for the Monster Jam event in Glendale this weekend. She also met Creten and got into the Scarlet Bandit, even starting the truck and revving the engines at one point.

"It was kind of scary," Lucy said. "A lot of vibrations."

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