

**Venice Boys & Girls Club Takes Top Prize In National Service Competition**  
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*Pre-teen service club honored for anti-bullying campaign*

ATLANTA, April 10, 2012 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Members of [Boys & Girls Club of Venice](#), Calif., have won first prize for their anti-bullying campaign in a national service competition from [Boys & Girls Clubs of America](#) (BGCA) and [Staples Foundation](#), a private foundation created by Staples, Inc. The Torch Club National Service Project called Linking Hearts & Hands recognizes children helping children through outstanding community service initiatives.

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(Logo: <http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20050921/CLW030LOGO>)

Members of the organization's Torch Club, a character and leadership program for youth ages 11-13, won for their "S.T.O.P.! Campaign (Stop Teasing Other People)." Torch Club members planned and implemented the program to help raise awareness among young people about the negative impact of bullying and to encourage them to stop teasing others.

The Torch Club members created the campaign after attending a town hall meeting about bullying, cyber-bullying and teen violence. After researching the issue, the pre-teens developed the anti-bullying campaign to take a stand against the issue. Activities included:

- Making candy grams with special encouraging messages to help victims who feel alone;
- Acquiring signatures from youth in a petition called "The End of Bullying Begins with Me;"
- Establishing an anti-violence gaming policy in the Club's tech lab;
- Hosting a screening for "Sky High," a film about how teamwork and loyalty can make you a hero;
- And using members' Facebook pages to reach other youth to take a stand against bullying.

The project was selected from more than 235 entries nationally to receive the top honor, which includes a \$2,500 award from Staples Foundation to benefit the Club.

The Torch Club National Service Project is an annual competition to encourage service in support of important issues that affect today's youth. Torch Club members across the country complete projects that benefit other youth in need. Through their participation in the competition, Torch Club members learn the value of giving back and seeing a project to completion. They also gain a better understanding of the needs of other youth – locally, nationally and globally – and share their knowledge with others.

"It's important to engage youth in developing strong character and leadership skills so they grow into conscientious members of society," said Kelvin Davis, senior director of character and citizenship for BGCA. "By participating in the Torch Club National Service Project, Club members are encouraged to help other young people through service. These projects teach them lessons about compassion, kindness and hard work which help them become positive leaders in their communities and schools."

The competition also recognized other Torch Clubs throughout the country for their outstanding service projects:

- Second place and \$1,500 was awarded to [Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, Gerald and Darlene Jordan Club - Kraft Family Youth Center](#) (Chelsea, Mass.) for "The Literacy For Life Project" which included a book drive and events to increase awareness and excitement around reading.
- Third place and \$1,000 was awarded to Navy MWR Mid Atlantic Boys & Girls Clubs, NAS Oceana Unit (Virginia Beach, Va.) for the "InSight to Senses" project which included educational activities about being visually impaired, creating audio books and hosting a sensory toy drive.
- Honorable mention and \$750 was awarded to [Boys & Girls Clubs of the Northtowns of WNY, Town Boys & Girls Club](#) (Buffalo, NY), for the "Torch for Unity" pen pal program with children from Community Services for the Developmentally Disabled.
- [Boys & Girls Club of Albany](#) (Albany, Ore.), was also recognized with honorable mention and \$750 for

its project, "Worldwide Connections: Albany to Albania," in which youth conducted a book drive, then transcribed and translated the stories into Albanian and sent them to youth in need in Albania.

Additionally, 45 Torch Clubs were recognized as merit winners and received \$500 for their service projects to help others.

The Torch Clubs were judged on originality, demonstration of leadership skills and impact on other youth. Judges included: Judith J. Pickens, senior vice president of program and youth development services for BGCA; Mary Tivnan, vice president/divisional merchandising manager at [Staples, Inc.](#); Darnisha Victorain, BGCA's 2011-12 Pacific region Youth of the Year and a former Torch Club member; and blogger Katie Allison Granju, for [MamaPundit.com](#) and [Babble.com](#).

"Throughout our 10-year relationship with Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Staples has proudly supported programs that encourage and reward civic engagement and community service," said Kirk Saville, vice president of global communications for Staples, Inc. "Through Boys & Girls Clubs initiatives such as the Torch Club National Service Project, we're able to help fulfill our mission to make a positive impact on the communities we serve, and spark a lasting passion for character and leadership in our youth."

Torch Clubs are small groups within Boys & Girls Clubs that encourage positive self-esteem and personal growth; build communication skills; reinforce academic achievement; and encourage the development of conscientious citizenship. Torch Club's mission is to motivate pre-teens to become role models and ambassadors for promoting good character, tolerance, diversity and inclusion among peers. Support from Staples Foundation enables BGCA to continue to provide training, programming and support to help meet the needs of pre-teens at this critical stage in their development.

### **About Boys & Girls Clubs of America**

For more than 100 years, Boys & Girls Clubs of America ( [GreatFutures.org](#)) has enabled young people most in need to achieve great futures as productive, caring, responsible citizens. Today, nearly 4,000 Boys & Girls Clubs serve some 4 million children and teens through Club membership and community outreach. Clubs are located in cities, towns, public housing and on Native American lands throughout the country, and serve military families in BGCA-affiliated Youth Centers on U.S. military installations worldwide. Clubs provide a safe place, caring adult mentors, fun and friendship, and high-impact youth development programs on a daily basis during critical non-school hours. Priority programs emphasize academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles. In a Harris Survey of alumni, 57 percent said the Club saved their lives. National headquarters are located in Atlanta. Learn more at [bgca.org/facebook](#) and [bgca.org/twitter](#).

### **About Staples Community and Giving**

Staples contributes to educational and youth-oriented community efforts, from literacy and mentoring to career skills development, through in-kind and monetary donations and grants from Staples Foundation, the private charitable arm of Staples, Inc. Through its community and giving efforts, Staples and Staples Foundation have helped more than 6,000 organizations in 2,000 communities across 27 countries. Community and Giving is also an integral component of Staples Soul, which recognizes the connection between long-term business success and the impact Staples has on associates, communities and the planet. For more information, visit [www.staples.com/community](#).

SOURCE Boys & Girls Clubs of America

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