

**Illinois' Top Youth Volunteers Of 2020 Selected By National Program**  
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**The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honors Barrington and Jacksonville students with \$1,000, medallions and trip to nation's capital**  
**Finalists also named in Bolingbrook, Hinsdale, Rio, Barrington, Peoria, Highland Park and Naperville**

SPRINGFIELD, Ill., Feb. 4, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- Carson Pazdan, 16, of Barrington and Kellon Oldenettel, 11, of Jacksonville today were named Illinois' top two youth volunteers of 2020 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. As State Honorees, Carson and Kellon each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and an all-expense-paid trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the top two honorees from each of the other states and the District of Columbia for four days of national recognition events. During the trip, 10 students will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2020.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

These are Illinois' top youth volunteers of 2020:

**High School State Honoree: Carson Pazdan**  
***Nominated by Barrington High School***

Carson, a sophomore at Barrington High School, has raised more than \$150,000 and collected thousands of pounds of food over the past nine years to feed the hungry by publishing a kids' cookbook, conducting other fundraising activities and running two large food drives each year. When he was 5 years old, Carson often helped his mother in the kitchen and would play around with his own recipes. One evening, they talked about hunger. "The concept that not everyone had food to eat was new to me at that young age," he said. "I remember feeling both sad for people facing hunger and a strong urge to help feed them."

Carson decided to create a cookbook by kids, for kids. With help from his mother, he compiled recipes from more than 800 other young people, printed 2,000 cookbooks and recruited "an army of kids" to sell them at schools, churches and community events. The venture raised \$40,000 for the Northern Illinois Food Bank. Carson then began conducting food drives twice a year at a local elementary school. Every May, he and other members of his "Kids Feeding Kids Club" ask parents to participate in a "drive-thru" event by loading their cars with food donations and dropping them off at the curb in front of the school. In October, students are given bags to take home and fill with food from their families' pantries. All the donations are sent to the Cuba Township Food Pantry. Carson's club also has organized fundraisers including "A Magical Matinee" at a movie theater and "Stars & Cars" at a car dealership -- all designed "to help feed our hungry neighbors," he said.

**Middle Level State Honoree: Kellon Oldenettel**  
***Nominated by South Jacksonville Elementary School***

Kellon, a fifth-grader at South Jacksonville Elementary School, has collected more than 10,000 pairs of new socks over the past six years and distributed them to people in need through shelters, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, community organizations and the Salvation Army. Many years ago, Kellon's mother told him "about all the struggles and hardships people have in the world, and that many don't have what I have," he said. He asked if that meant some people don't have socks. Kellon immediately wanted to go to the store and buy some, but quickly realized that the need was probably too great for that solution. He called a few family members to help and placed a posting on Facebook. Within a few weeks, he had more than 500 pairs of socks.

Now, "Kellon's Sock Drawer" is a project that runs all year long. Starting in the winter, Kellon asks a half-dozen local businesses for permission to place decorated collection boxes on their premises, and stops by each location weekly to pick up donated socks. He also speaks to young people, community organizations and other groups about his mission. After he sorts and counts all the socks he's received, with the

assistance of sorority sisters at a local college, Kellon begins the distribution process. He has donated socks to families impacted by house fires, to mission groups heading overseas and to chemotherapy infusion labs at hospitals, as well as to elementary schools, nursing homes and charitable organizations. In addition, Kellon personally hands out socks at public housing events, mobile food pantries and a local shelter. "No one deserves to have cold feet," he said.

### **Distinguished Finalists**

The program judges also recognized eight other Illinois students as Distinguished Finalists for their impressive community service activities. Each will receive an engraved bronze medallion.

These are Illinois' Distinguished Finalists for 2020:

**Kayla Austin, 16, of Bolingbrook, Illinois**, a junior at Cranbrook Schools, has volunteered hundreds of hours of her time to fight gun violence and encourage teen activism; she raised money to host two screenings of the film "The Hate U Give," followed by panel discussions with 300 young people in Chicago and Detroit. Kayla also developed and facilitated four "How to be a Teen Advocate" workshops at teen leadership conferences across the country.

**Alexandra Collins, 15, of Hinsdale, Illinois**, a sophomore at Hinsdale Central High School, started an initiative called "Students Against Ethylene Oxide (SAEtO)" with her sister, helping to fight the emission of a dangerous gas in her community; she spread awareness, organized a letter-writing campaign and protests, attended hearings and lobbied government officials. Alexandra and her organization have expanded to support legislation to ban similar emissions across the country.

**Lucy Kuelper, 12, of Rio, Illinois**, a member of Knox County 4-H and a seventh-grader at ROWVA Junior/Senior High School, started the "Move Over Project" to spread awareness about laws that require drivers to change lanes when a vehicle is stopped on the side of the road; her efforts include speaking at events, managing a social media page and connecting with legislative representatives. Lucy, whose father is a state trooper, had her project presented on the U.S. Senate floor by Senator Dick Durbin.

**Morgan Larson, 16, of Barrington, Illinois**, a junior at Barrington High School, started and runs "60010 Feeds Kids," a project that has raised more than \$20,000 and packaged more than 80,000 meals for children experiencing food insecurity; her efforts include recruiting volunteers, securing corporate sponsors, holding fundraisers and establishing partnerships with other organizations. The project has benefitted more than 2,600 children worldwide.

**Phillip Mathew, 17, of Hinsdale, Illinois**, a senior at Hinsdale Central High School, worked with his brother to develop "Got Food?," a mobile app that allows users to locate nearby food pantries and soup kitchens, and determine their eligibility for food and housing benefits. Phillip regularly updates information and features on his app, has helped establish partnerships with other organizations fighting hunger, and co-authored a position paper on a piece of congressional legislation.

**Ava Ramsey, 17, of Peoria, Illinois**, a senior at Peoria Christian School, has volunteered hundreds of hours of her time working with middle school students in her community's drama program; her efforts include creating and teaching choreography, teaching technique, making props, managing lighting and sound and recruiting other volunteers. Ava, who has participated in drama herself, was inspired to start this volunteer activity by her mother and grandmother, who share her passion for the arts.

**Susan Tatelli, 17, of Highland Park, Illinois**, a senior at Highland Park High School, developed educational videos and materials to teach people how to administer epinephrine auto-injectors when someone is having an allergic reaction; she also speaks at events about her experience with allergies and has presented her educational curriculum to more than 2,000 people. Susan has also started translating her materials to Spanish to increase their reach.

**Vivian Zhao, 18, of Naperville, Illinois**, a senior at Naperville Central High School, co-founded and runs "All Hearts Count," a nonprofit organization that has donated six WoManikin attachments for CPR "manikins"—CPR training dummies traditionally shaped like male bodies—to help students learn how to administer CPR on women; she has also organized several fundraisers in addition to raising awareness of her cause. Vivian started this project after learning that, due to factors including sexual harassment concerns, women are 15 percent less likely to receive CPR than men in public.

"In our 25<sup>th</sup> year of honoring young volunteers, we are as inspired as ever by the work students are doing to address the needs of a changing world," said Charles Lowrey, chairman and CEO of Prudential Financial, Inc. "We hope that their resolve, their initiative and their perspectives on society's challenges move others to consider how they can make a difference, too."

"Middle level and high school students are doing remarkable things to shape the future of their communities through volunteer service. They inspire all students and schools to drive learning with real-world challenges," said JoAnn Bartoletti, executive director of NASSP. "Congratulations to each of the 2020 honorees – it's an honor to celebrate your commitment to creating positive change."

### **About The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards**

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards represents the United States' largest youth recognition program based solely on volunteer service. All public and private middle level and high schools in the country, as well as all Girl Scout councils, county 4-H organizations, American Red Cross chapters, YMCAs and Points of Light Global Network members, were eligible to select a student or member for a local Prudential Spirit of Community Award. These Local Honorees were then reviewed by an independent judging panel, which selected State Honorees and Distinguished Finalists based on criteria including personal initiative, effort, impact and personal growth.

While in Washington, D.C., the 102 State Honorees – one middle level and one high school student from each state and the District of Columbia – will tour the capital's landmarks, meet top youth volunteers from other parts of the world, attend a gala awards ceremony at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, and visit their congressional representatives on Capitol Hill. On May 4, 10 of the State Honorees – five middle level and five high school students – will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2020. These National Honorees will receive additional \$5,000 scholarships, gold medallions, crystal trophies and \$5,000 grants from Prudential for nonprofit charitable organizations of their choice.

Since the program began in 1995, more than 130,000 young volunteers have been honored at the local, state and national level. The program also is conducted by Prudential subsidiaries in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Ireland, India, China and Brazil. In addition to granting its own awards, The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program also distributes President's Volunteer Service Awards to qualifying Local Honorees.

For information on all of this year's Prudential Spirit of Community State Honorees and Distinguished Finalists, visit <http://spirit.prudential.com> or [www.nassp.org/spirit](http://www.nassp.org/spirit).

### **About NASSP**

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for principals and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student's potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the National Honor Society, National Junior Honor Society, National Elementary Honor Society, and National Student Council. Learn more at [www.nassp.org](http://www.nassp.org)

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***For Spirit of Community Awards program logo and medallion graphics, please visit <https://spirit.prudential.com/resources/media>***



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