

**Kansas' Top Two Youth Volunteers Selected in 18 th Annual National Awards Program**  
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**Lenexa and Hiawatha students earn \$1,000 awards, engraved medallions and trip to nation's capital**

**Honors also bestowed on youth volunteers in Eudora, Overland Park and Auburn**

Cassie Wang, 17, of Lenexa and Alec Elffner, 14, of Hiawatha today were named Kansas' top two youth volunteers of 2013 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. Cassie was nominated by Olathe Northwest High School in Olathe, and Alec was nominated by Hiawatha Middle School in Hiawatha. The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, now in its 18th year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

Cassie, a senior at Olathe Northwest High School, leveraged her golf skills to raise money for the rebuilding of homes and businesses in Joplin, Mo. after the devastating tornado that struck that city in 2011, and then chaired two blood drives in her community and launched a student-run nonprofit to benefit disaster victims both in Joplin and in China. While driving to a golf tournament just after Joplin's tornado, Cassie saw firsthand the devastation it had wrought. "My heart ached as I watched people walk the streets who might not have had a home or bed to sleep in that night," she recalls. Upon returning home, she asked local businesses, private donors and her golf fans to make a donation for Joplin relief efforts every time she scored a "birdie" in a tournament. She publicized her "Birdies for Charity" campaign through brochures, a website and social media, and before long, she had raised \$1,000 for tornado victims in Joplin.

Having experienced the joy of helping others, Cassie volunteered to chair a community blood drive as an officer of her school's student council. She distributed flyers throughout the school district, made a promotional video, recruited more than 150 people to help, and secured food and raffle donations from 18 businesses. That drive collected a record 430 units of blood, and a second drive began last fall. Cassie also formed a nonprofit group of students that has raised more than \$8,000 to provide computers and other items to a sister school in an earthquake-ravaged area of China, and to continue supporting relief efforts in Joplin.

Alec, an eighth-grader at Hiawatha Middle School, has given more than 500 winter coats over the past five years to young people whose families cannot afford them. In the third grade, Alec saw a boy in his class who did not have a coat on a cold winter day. The next day, Alec brought one of his coats that didn't fit anymore to the school nurse and asked her to give it to the boy. "It made me feel good that I had helped him," said Alec.

That feeling prompted Alec to begin conducting coat drives every year to make sure other children in need in his community could stay warm during Kansas' frigid winters. He appeals to residents and organizations in his town for coat donations and for money to buy more coats. He also works with school social workers and counselors to identify students in need, and then collaborates with a community action program to distribute the coats at the beginning of the school year. "The most difficult part of the coat drive," said Alec, "is knowing that I can't help everyone who is poor."

As State Honorees, Cassie and Alec 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 2013.

**Distinguished Finalists**

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

These are Kansas' Distinguished Finalists for 2013:

**Logan Brown, 17, of Eudora, Kan.**, a junior at Lawrence Free State High School, raised more than \$10,000 to support the GaDuGi SafeCenter, a local haven for victims of sexual violence. Luke, who first saw the

horror of sexual crime while volunteering in the District Attorney's office, hosted a silent auction event for two years in a row to raise the funds that helped to continue and expand counseling and other programs offered by the center.

**Blake Carnes, 17, of Overland Park, Kan.**, a senior at Blue Valley West High School, founded "Blake's Closet" in 2010 to collect, sort and distribute clothing to more than 2,000 people in need. Blake, who also hosted food drives for seven consecutive years, has raised more than \$11,000 for cancer research by hosting a charity golf tournament.

**Luke Garrison, 17, of Auburn, Kan.**, a member of the Shawnee County 4-H and a senior at Washburn Rural High School, created a "Minute to Lead It" youth leadership course that he has presented to more than 1,000 youth throughout Kansas at various statewide 4-H events. Luke, who started his program in 2010, has spent nearly 450 hours developing the course and presentation in order to influence young people to serve their communities.

**Anna Lipscomb, 16, of Overland Park, Kan.**, a junior at Heritage Christian Academy, raised \$90,000 to help build four orphanages in Haiti since 2009 when she wrote and recorded the CD "Heart for Haiti" and donated the proceeds. Anna also speaks publicly about her work with orphaned children in Haiti to inspire others to help make a difference for those in need.

"Prudential is proud to honor these students for making meaningful contributions to their communities," said Prudential Chairman and CEO John Strangfeld. "We hope that shining a spotlight on their initiative, creativity and compassion inspires others to consider how they, too, can make a difference."

"Through their volunteer service, each of these young people has made his or her mark on at least one person, school or community," said JoAnn Bartoletti, executive director of NASSP. "When you consider the collective impact of each of these individual acts, it's clear that young people can be a major force for good."

### **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 HandsOn Network affiliates, were eligible to select a student or member for a local Prudential Spirit of Community Award. Nearly 5,000 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 6, 10 of the State Honorees – five middle level and five high school students – will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2013. These National Honorees will receive additional \$5,000 awards, gold medallions, crystal trophies and \$5,000 grants from The Prudential Foundation for nonprofit charitable organizations of their choice.

Since the program began in 1995, more than 100,000 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 and India. 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 on behalf of President Barack Obama.

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**

NASSP (National Association of Secondary School Principals) is the leading organization of and national voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and all school leaders from across the United States and more than 36 countries around the world. The association provides research-based

professional development and resources, networking, and advocacy to build the capacity of middle level and high school leaders to continually improve student performance. Reflecting its longstanding commitment to student leadership development as well, NASSP administers the National Honor Society™, National Junior Honor Society®, National Elementary Honor Society®, and National Association of Student Councils®. For more information about NASSP, located in Reston, VA, visit [www.nassp.org](http://www.nassp.org).

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**Editors: For full-color pictures of the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program logo and medallions, click here: <http://bit.ly/Xi4oFW>**

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