

Virginia's Top Youth Volunteers Of 2018 Selected By National Program
Tuesday, February 06, 2018 02:07:00 PM (GMT)

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honors Glen Allen students with \$1,000, medallions and trip to nation's capital
Finalists also named in Vienna, Sumerduck, Chantilly, Ashburn, Christiansburg and Moseley

RICHMOND, Va., Feb. 6, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Jocelyn Marencik, 17 and Gretchen Gregor, 13, both of Glen Allen, today were named Virginia's top two youth volunteers of 2018 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. As State Honorees, Jocelyn and Gretchen each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and an all-expense-paid trip in late April 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 2018.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, now in its 23rd year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

These are Virginia's top youth volunteers of 2018:

High School State Honoree: Jocelyn Marencik
Nominated by Deep Run High School in Glen Allen

Jocelyn, a junior at Deep Run High School, has delivered nearly \$20,000 worth of technology equipment to 55 classrooms in more than 25 underserved schools in the Richmond area, and offered computer coding instruction to students in four of those schools. Jocelyn, who is passionate about technology and about helping others, was inspired to start her "Got Tec Richmond" initiative after reading that only 17 percent of computer science majors in the U.S. are women and less than 8 percent of either gender are African American or Hispanic. Around the same time, a local television station ran a report about the discrepancy between the technology available in inner-city schools and the tech resources in wealthier suburban areas. "This seemed highly unfair in that it doesn't allow every student the same opportunity to learn important 21st century skills to succeed and have their own voice," said Jocelyn. "I wanted to find a way to balance this inequitable situation."

She first contacted principals and board members in inner-city schools and discussed with teachers her idea of offering events to teach students computer coding. Everyone was enthusiastic, so Jocelyn began fundraising by selling hats, scarves and blankets that she crocheted, organizing aluminum recycling drives, and seeking grants and donations. With funds in hand, Jocelyn asks schools what they need, shops for equipment, and makes deliveries. Additionally, 114 elementary and middle school students have attended the "Learn to Code" events that she has organized. One such event sparked so much interest that students at that school have now started a coding club, said Jocelyn. "If you can combine your volunteerism with your passion, then it is life-changing for you and for those you've helped," she said.

Middle Level State Honoree: Gretchen Gregor
Nominated by Holman Middle School in Glen Allen

Gretchen, a seventh-grader at Holman Middle School, conducted collection drives to provide new blankets to the homeless at Christmastime in Richmond, and to provide school supplies to a school in a low-income part of her community. "My motivation for both of these drives was my desire to help others," said Gretchen. When her parents asked her in 2016 what she wanted for Christmas, she told them blankets for the homeless. She was motivated to do something to help people living on the streets of nearby Richmond. "I wanted them to feel like they mattered," Gretchen said. "No one should be forgotten just because they can't afford a home."

After asking her family to donate, she set up bins where people could drop off blankets and publicized her cause through fliers and the local media. Her efforts yielded 450 brand-new blankets, which she and her mother delivered to a local shelter. Several months later, Gretchen began collecting school supplies after her

math tutor moved to a school in a low-income area and told her that many of the students there couldn't afford to buy supplies, so teachers had to use their own money. Once again, Gretchen promoted her drive through the media and collected "bins, boxes, and bags" of markers, glue sticks, notebooks and other items children need to start the school year. "It's hard to succeed in school when you don't have the necessary supplies," said Gretchen.

Distinguished Finalists

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

These are Virginia's Distinguished Finalists for 2018:

Medhaa Banaji, 17, of Vienna, Va., a senior at George C. Marshall High School, coordinated a series of community nutrition workshops that raised awareness about healthy eating amongst 150 participants, and later created a club at her school to support the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Medhaa's club, which has drawn about 75 members, participates in activities including a fundraising walk and pen pal correspondence with hospitalized kids.

Devon Disanza, 17, of Sumerduck, Va., a member of Fauquier County 4-H and a senior at Sumerduck Homeschool, led a project to renovate a nonfunctional kitchen at a local VFW post, securing more than \$21,000 in cash and materials and recruiting volunteer subcontractors to make the building easier to use and rent out for community events. Devon, who solicited support from several businesses for the project, also raised enough money to help remodel two bathrooms at the facility.

Madeleine Lebeau, 16, of Chantilly, Va., a sophomore at Chantilly High School, is the leader and creator of "iWitnessed-iRemember," an educational program that provides teenagers with opportunities to learn about World War II directly from people who lived through it, and coordinates service activities to benefit veterans and troops serving today. Madeleine has reached more than 1,000 people with her project through activities including community events and veteran outreach.

Saarthak Maheshwari, 16, of Ashburn, Va., a junior at Stone Bridge High School, is the co-founder and president of "Peers and Students Taking Action (PASTA)," a volunteer group that has conducted nearly 100 projects to support local kids. Saarthak's program, which he estimates has impacted more than 10,000 local children, empowers student members of 16 chapters to pick and conduct service projects that are meaningful to them.

Connor Moran, 17, of Christiansburg, Va., a senior at Christiansburg High School, has led about 50 student volunteers in providing weekly food backpacks for students in need with the Christiansburg High School OutReach Club, an initiative he started during his sophomore year. Connor also serves his community as a volunteer emergency medical technician with the Christiansburg Rescue Squad.

Nolan Zunk, 18, of Moseley, Va., a senior at Clover Hill High School, is the founder and director of the "Torch Organization," a nonprofit that since 2013 has staged performances and conducted other service activities aimed at promoting respect and raising awareness about sexual assault and prevention. Nolan's group recently performed its third one-act play to an audience of 600, and painted a wall mural depicting the importance of love.

"Prudential is proud to recognize these remarkable young people for using their energy, creativity and compassion to bring meaningful change to their communities," said Prudential Chairman and CEO John Strangfeld. "We hope their stories inspire others to consider how they can do the same."

"These middle level and high school students have not only improved the lives of the people and communities they've served – they also set an important example for their peers," said JoAnn Bartoletti, executive director of NASSP. "These honorees prove that you're never too young to make a difference."

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 affiliates of

Points of Light's HandsOn Network, 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 April 30, 10 of the State Honorees – five middle level and five high school students – will be named America's top youth volunteers of 2018. 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 120,000 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, Brazil and Poland. 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.

About NASSP

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and school leaders from across the United States. The association connects and engages school leaders through advocacy, research, education, and student programs. NASSP advocates on behalf of all school leaders to ensure the success of each student and strengthens school leadership practices through the design and delivery of high quality professional learning experiences. 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. For more information about NASSP, located in Reston, VA, visit www.nassp.org.

About Prudential Financial

Prudential Financial, Inc. (NYSE: PRU), a financial services leader, has operations in the United States, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Prudential's diverse and talented employees are committed to helping individual and institutional customers grow and protect their wealth through a variety of products and services, including life insurance, annuities, retirement-related services, mutual funds and investment management. In the U.S., Prudential's iconic Rock symbol has stood for strength, stability, expertise and innovation for more than a century. For more information, please visit www.news.prudential.com.

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

☐ View original content with multimedia: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/virginias-top-youth-volunteers-of-2018-selected-by-national-program-300592850.html>

SOURCE Prudential Financial, Inc.

Contacts: Harold Banks, Prudential Financial, (973) 802-8974 or (973) 216-4833,
harold.banks@prudential.com

Industries: Banking & Financial Services, Education, Insurance

Languages: English

Primary Identifiers: PRU-US

Related Identifiers: PRU-US

Subjects: Corporate Social Responsibility, Human Interest Groups