

Lillis, Nicole

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Volunteer Laney Weaver Honored with an 11Alive Community Service Award

If you spot Elena Weaver in the hallways at Egleston, she's likely to be carrying flowers, helping a new employee find the Employee Health Services office or delivering *Hospital Happenings*, the weekly calendar of events, to patient rooms. Since 2008, she's given her mornings three days a week, ultimately earning one of the highest volunteer honors at Children's in October 2011: ELITE Volunteer status, reserved for those who have given more than 1,000 hours to the organization (a number she's since doubled).

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This dedication drove Elena's friends at Volunteer Services to nominate her for **11Alive's 38th annual Community Service Awards**. At a dinner hosted by anchor Brenda Wood Tuesday, April 23, 2013, Elena received her 11 Who Care award, along with other local volunteers, including Lovette Twyman Russell, who serves on the Children's Foundation Board of Trustees and won the Boisfeuillet Jones Award.

Elena, known as Laney at Children's, started volunteering after a friend with special needs encouraged her to take on a half-day a week. Laney herself was born with complex birth defects and disabilities, including Turner syndrome, Crouzon syndrome and mild cerebral palsy, and had spent much of her childhood in hospitals for surgeries and extensive therapies. She said of her decision to volunteer at Children's, "It was time for me to find out what it's like to be on the other side of the bed. I wanted to help."

That perspective as a former pediatric patient makes her an especially welcome face for kids who are in and out of the hospital frequently. Laney recognizes regular patients and they recognize her, often stopping to wave or say hello; according to her mother, Linda, "[Laney] is very proud of these moments."

When she's not volunteering at Children's, Laney trains for the highest level of Special Olympics competition. After being introduced to the **Special Olympics of Georgia** (SOGA) at Tucker High School, she began competing at 18, first in artistic gymnastics, then in rhythmic gymnastics, winning gold, silver and bronze medals. In 2010, she and three of her SOGA teammates competed in rhythmic gymnastics for the USA Team in Greece. Laney also acts as a public face of SOGA, traveling across the state as an ambassador and helping raise funds for the games.

Laney, who wasn't expected to live beyond her first year, said during her award acceptance speech of her time at Children's, "My life is rich and my heart is full. I love being a part of this wonderful organization." She plans to donate half of her award money to Egleston's **Camp Courage**, a camp for kids with craniofacial abnormalities; the other half will pay for three kids to attend Special Olympics training camp this summer.

To learn more about why Volunteer Services department so values the community support they receive from people like Laney, read their post, **Five Reasons We Love Our Dedicated Volunteers**, on the Children's blog. And don't forget: National Healthcare Volunteer Week, which runs through April 27, is a great time to stop and thank any volunteer who makes your job better.

Image, top: Laney is pictured at the 11Alive dinner surrounded by members of the Volunteer Services department.

Image, bottom: Laney delivers Hospital Happenings at Egleston.



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