



# THE PRUDENTIAL SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY REPORT

The official newspaper of The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, sponsored by Prudential Financial and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Copyright 2008 Prudential Financial. All rights reserved.

## New Jersey Teen Proudly Leads Community in 'Freedom Walk'

He is barely old enough to remember the day it happened, but for 13-year-old Joey Rizzolo of Paramus, N.J., "the hurt still lingers."

Joey took it upon himself to bring his community together in what he called a "Freedom Walk" in memory of the victims of 9/11, several of whom were from his community. On a day last September, more than 450 local residents joined with Joey to honor everyone who died that day, as well as to thank first responders, service members and veterans.

It was a day Joey and everyone else in his community will always remember. "It was an emotional and uplift-

ing experience," he recalls. "Over 450 people gathered to remember, reflect and renew their commitment to freedom and values that make America strong."

Like any great volunteer project, Joey's Freedom Walk took a lot of time, effort and planning. First he had to get town and school officials to approve the idea. Then he had to line up a faculty sponsor and get his friends to agree to help him out.

After the groundwork was laid, the real work began. Joey and his group held assemblies at his and other schools in the community to spread the word and to line up other workers, groups that

would march in the parade, and so on. He also worked



Joey Rizzolo

hard to find a location.

As if that wasn't work

enough, Joey and his group had to raise money, arrange for food and refreshments, and rent tents for the festivities. Joey wound up raising more than \$7,000, and the parade went off without a hitch.

For Joey, a State Honoree in the 2008 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program, the parade was a natural outgrowth of his other volunteer activities, which have included sending "goody bags" to U.S. servicemen and women. When he heard about a similar parade that was being planned in Washington, DC, Joey decided his town needed one, too. "My town suffered great losses on September 11," he explained.

## Spirit of Community State Honorees Earn \$1,000 Awards, Trip to DC

For the 13th consecutive year, the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program has chosen America's 102 most outstanding youth volunteers, two from each state and the District of Columbia. Each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, DC in early May for ceremonies at which 10 of them will be

advantaged, either in their own communities or overseas. Over 20% were recognized for projects that helped the sick or disabled, while 8% contributed to school or community resources and 7% taught, tutored or mentored other young people.

"The volunteer work of this year's honorees is as inspiring as any we've seen, and we are honored to recognize the amazing contributions they've

## Over 9 Years, Shanna Decker Has Visited Hundreds of Sick Kids

Many Prudential Spirit of Community State Honorees get involved in their award-winning volunteer projects because of a personal experience, and Shanna Decker of Plainview, Minnesota is no exception.

When she was only 7 years old, Shanna lost a leg to cancer and had to undergo a year of aggressive chemotherapy. "During this time I made the decision to take a tragic situation in my life and somehow turn it into a positive experience," Shanna remembers.

Shanna asked her doctors to put her in touch with other young cancer patients. Over the years she has made more than 600 visits, bringing with her "Hearts of Hope" boxes that contain gifts and more. "When a cancer survivor walks

into the room, patients have a renewed sense of hope," says Shanna.

Shanna also speaks on the subject and has participated in fund-raisers that have generat-



Shanna Decker

ed more than \$120,000 to better the lives of the less fortunate. She does it because, as she puts it, "I know how hard it was to travel this lonely road alone, and I was determined to make a difference in the lives of others."



named America's top youth volunteers for 2008.

Of this year's 102 State Honorees and 234 Distinguished Finalists, one out of three was honored for a volunteer project that aided the dis-

made to their neighborhoods, cities and nation," said Arthur F. Ryan, chairman of Prudential Financial, which conducts the program in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

### Quiz Question

According to a recent survey, what percentage of Britons said that volunteering has helped them improve their health and fitness? (Answer and more questions are on the back page)



## HELPERS AROUND THE WORLD

**"D**espite overwhelming sadness and devastation, I saw hope in the easy smiles of countless orphans."

So says Zoe Isaacs of Sharon, VT., explaining why she has helped develop a youth program in the African country of Rwanda. The goal of the program is to give orphans and impoverished children education and med-



**Zoe Isaacs**

ical testing for HIV/AIDS, plus sports equipment and training.

Zoe got started when she visited her brother, who is an aid worker in Rwanda. She discovered that, "There existed possibility, even among shacks

and shanties riddled with starvation and disease."

Having so far raised more than \$7,500, Zoe says simply yet eloquently, "As citizens of the Western world, we have the resources to help. We cannot afford to sit by and watch as problems of poverty and disease escalate."

\* \* \*

Rachel Lambin has raised and donated more than \$30,000 to purchase land and help build a new school for orphans in the African country of Kenya.

Rachel, who is from Gardnerville, Nev., got involved when she heard a man speak at her church about slums outside of Nairobi, Kenya. "I saw a need and began to act on it," she remembers.

Rachel organized a volunteer group that collected textbooks and other school supplies. Last summer she trav-

eled to Kenya with her family and taught in the new school building.

"I know there are poor people in our own backyard,"



**Rachel Lambin**

she says, "but even the poorest of the poor in America are living much better than the average person" she is helping.

\* \* \*

Alison Mansfield has been collecting and sending packages of food, letters and personal-care items to U.S. soldiers in Iraq for the past two years. She's also been helping soldiers when they return home to recuperate.

Alison, who is from Fort Wayne, Ind., says, "I believe it

is important to honor those who have made sacrifices to preserve the many freedoms we enjoy."

Alison has persuaded restaurants and airlines to ask their customers to write letters to the soldiers. She has convinced members of her Girl Scout troop and 4-H club to do the same.

In addition, she has asked hotels and dental supply com-



**Alison Mansfield**

panies to donate soap, shaving gear, sewing kits, coffee, toothpaste and more. She packages everything and sends it to military families in Iraq and to Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

## NEWS

The governor of California, Arnold Schwarzenegger, has created a new Cabinet-level position for service and volunteering. The governor said the goal of the new post is to bring attention to the need for people to volunteer on big projects, and to make it easier for them to take action when something happens, such as a giant oil spill in San Francisco Bay or a wildfire around San Diego.

\* \* \*

There's a hot new program at Fremont Elementary School in Nevada. Nearly 60 kids have volunteered to learn sign language. At first the program was intended just to help the kids interact with hearing-impaired students at the school. But now the kids are taking what they have learned and teaching it to their parents and friends.

Kids in grades one through five come regularly before school to learn the different signs. The program "gives students confidence," the school's principal was recently quoted as saying. "And it really turns them into teachers."

If you think that kids volunteering to learn sign language are cool, listen to this.

A boy in California who has a disease that makes it painful for him to write has conquered his problem and is now using what he learned to help others.

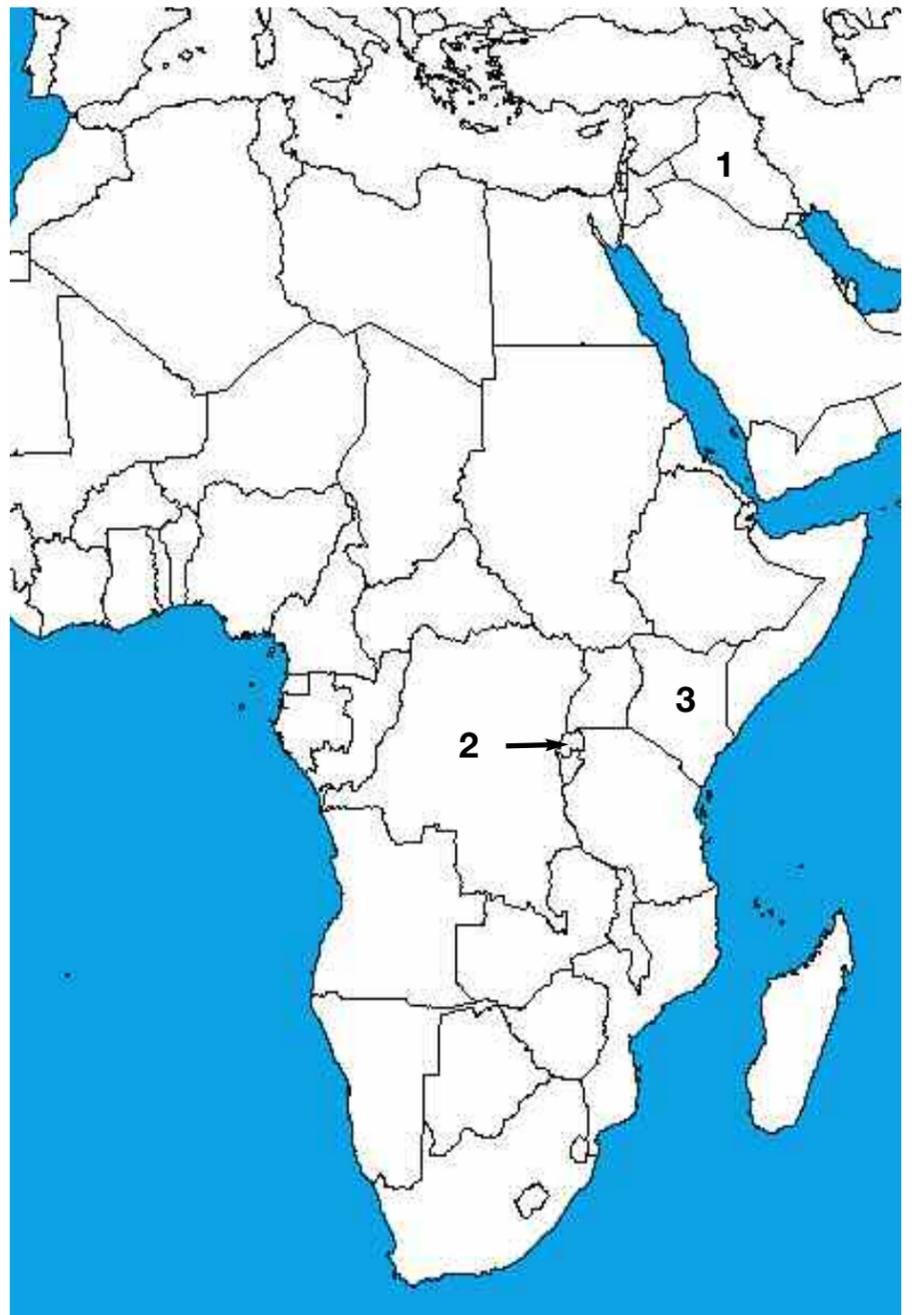
Instead of writing with a pencil or pen, the boy uses a laptop computer, on which he learned how to type the words he couldn't write. He now volunteers his time at a local homeless shelter, where he teaches kids how to write and play on a computer.

\* \* \*

As much as youth volunteers have helped the Greater Boston Food Bank over the years, the program has always had a problem.

The problem was that kids younger than 16 had to be turned away because of the heavy lifting involved.

But now kids as young as 10 are able to participate. Their job is to stuff food into bags that are then delivered to families and seniors in need throughout the Boston area.



At the top of this page we described the volunteer projects of three kids. Each has dedicated her time to helping others in a foreign country – Rwanda, Kenya and Iraq. Can you find each of these three countries on the numbered map?

(Answers are on back page)



## Girl Helps Kids Cope with Loss of Police Officer Parents

When she was only six months old, Katelyn Philpot's father, a police officer, was murdered by a gang member, and a group called the Michigan Concerns of Police Survivors (MICOPS) came to her family's aid.

Today Katelyn, now 13, helps MICOPS help other families. "As I began to see so many kids throughout my life that have gone through the same thing, I knew that MICOPS was their guiding light," says Katelyn. "I recognized that these children needed a friend, pined for a normal life and desperately wanted someone who understood the agony they were experiencing."

Katelyn, one of this year's Prudential Spirit of Community State Honorees, raised money to pay for kids of fallen police officers to attend a special camp. She serves as a mentor

to help them deal with their grief. She also volunteers at MICOPS activities throughout the year. Together with her mother, Katelyn tries to help as



Katelyn Philpot

many kids as she can on a one-to-one basis.

"It is very difficult to watch children shed tears and be in so much pain," she says. "But I know that sharing my story with them helps them to understand that they are not alone and that they, too, can make it through this."

## Haley Whatley Gives Stuffed Bunnies to Kids in Hospitals

When she was only six years old, Haley Whatley of North Richland Hills, Texas saw a commercial on TV about children with cancer. The commercial really made an impression.

Ever since Haley has been collecting stuffed animals for sick children at a local hospital and handing them out around Easter, Haley's favorite holiday. Now 13, Haley has handed out more than 13,000 new stuffed bunnies (bunnies being perfect for Easter) over the last seven years.

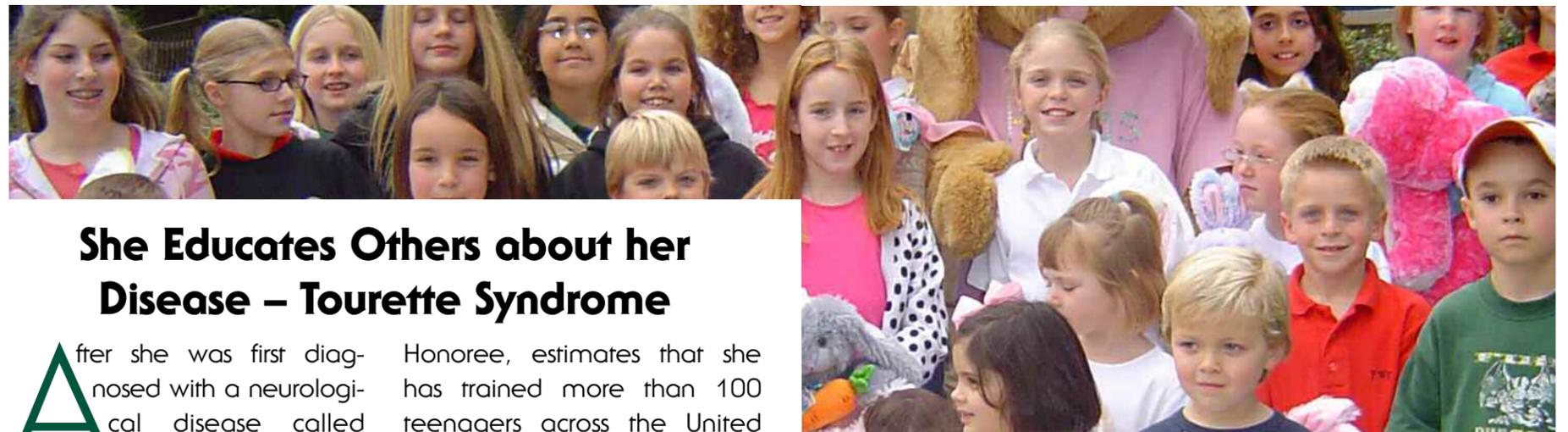
How did she get started? "I told everyone I knew that I needed stuffed bunnies, and boy, did they help," she remembers. After collecting 600 animals her first year, Haley branched out with the help of 30 "bunny ambassadors" she recruited. She and her ambassadors collect at schools and churches, and from scout

troops and sports teams. Haley personally has spoken to more than 50 civic groups and has lined up a number of corporate sponsorships.



Haley Whatley, above, and below with friends

Every year she and her ambassadors bag the bunnies and take them in a big trailer to the hospital where they are handed out. "I just want to make (all the sick kids) feel better so they can go home happy and healthy," says Haley, a 2008 Prudential Spirit of Community State Honoree.



## She Educates Others about her Disease – Tourette Syndrome

After she was first diagnosed with a neurological disease called Tourette Syndrome (TS), Jennifer Zwilling of Brookville, N.Y. tried with her mom to educate people about TS. "I found that people were not as tolerant, understanding or knowledgeable regarding TS as one would hope."

But instead of getting angry or hurt, Jennifer reached out to other kids with TS and started working to help people everywhere better understand this disease.

As the founder of the Youth Ambassador Training Program of the National Tourette Syndrome Association, Jennifer has developed a training manual and recruited other kids to go into their communities and help people become more aware of kids and families that must wrestle with TS.

Jennifer, a 2008 Prudential Spirit of Community State

Honoree, estimates that she has trained more than 100 teenagers across the United States and has spoken at more than 50 schools, reaching a combined audience of more than 3,000 students, teachers and academic advisers. She also has testified before the U.S. Congress several times.

"I have learned from experience that knowledge is power," she says. "Knowledge about TS gives classmates the



Jennifer Zwilling

power to accept, understand and be supportive."

## For a Summer Camp to be Fun, It Takes Volunteers like Isac

All it took was, as he puts it, "my willingness to share my time."

Thus did Isac Shephard, a 12-year-old from Arapaho, Okla., decide to become a volunteer at the same Cub Scout camp he had attended when he was younger.

"I knew there was a need for volunteers," says Isac, a 2008 Prudential Spirit of Community State Honoree. "Without volunteers it would be impossible to have a successful camp for the boys who want to attend."

For the past two summers Isac has helped out by showing boys how to handle a BB gun safely and what to do if they

find a real gun in their home or yard. He's also done a bunch of other stuff, such as



Isac Shephard

manning water stations and chaperoning campers without a parent on trips.

Isac's goal? He wants to influence other scouts to do what he does.

## Quiz

1. What percentage of British kids ages 18 to 24 who smoke say that volunteering has helped them smoke less:  
**a.** 10%  
**b.** 20%  
**c.** 30%  
**d.** 50%
2. What percentage of Britons ages 25 to 34 say that volunteering helps them feel less stressed:  
**a.** 19%  
**b.** 31%  
**c.** 47%  
**d.** 63%
3. What words do Britons use most to describe their volunteering experience:  
**a.** Rewarding  
**b.** Challenging  
**c.** Interesting  
**d.** All of the above
4. People who volunteer for nonprofit organizations in the U.S. contribute the equivalent amount of time as how many paid employees:  
**a.** 4 million  
**b.** 9 million  
**c.** 13 million  
**d.** 20 million
5. What's the number one reason Americans say they do not volunteer:  
**a.** Not enough time  
**b.** No transportation  
**c.** No one asked  
**d.** None of the above
6. U.S. parents with children under 18 are more likely to volunteer than people without children. What percentage of parents with kids under 18 volunteers:  
**a.** 28%  
**b.** 37%  
**c.** 46%  
**d.** 55%

1. c; 2. d; 3. d; 4. b; 5. a; 6. b

## QUIZ ANSWERS

### Quiz answer from page 1

According to a recent survey, 47% of British volunteers thought that volunteering had helped them improve their health and fitness.

## MAP ANSWERS

1. IRAQ
2. RWANDA
3. KENYA

## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"She invited me to go with her, and I have been helping out ever since."

That's the simple and direct explanation for why Jena Piccolo, a 13-year-old from



Westerly, R.I., works with a friend as a supervisor and mentor for children at programs sponsored by a local church.

Jena helps kids memorize Bible verses, checks their homework, and serves refreshments. When one of her charges thanked her one day, "I realized that what I was teaching the kids was really helping them."

That may be the simplest explanation of why it feels good to be a volunteer that you will ever hear – one worth thinking about.

\* \* \*

"I really do feel that these men and women are heroes," says Hannah Burlingham, a 14-year-old from Hamilton, Mont., explaining why she created a program called "Operation Cloverleaf." Hannah collects snacks, stamps, socks and more, puts it all in packages (along with a personal letter), and sends the packages to U.S. mili-



tary serving overseas.

Having so far sent more than 130 of what she calls "Montana

Freedom Boxes," Hannah says, "I became involved in this project so that troops will know that I love them and that I'm thankful to be an American."

Hannah doesn't do it alone. She has lots of help from other volunteers from her 4-H club and a local retirement home.

\* \* \*

"I felt very scared and saw my parents cry a lot," remembers Nicholas Marriam, of the time when he was only six years old and battling cancer. "I fought hard and finally won my battle, but did not want the kids who were still struggling to feel alone."

And so Nicholas, now 15, began a program where he brings sick kids in hospitals games and toys collected from friends and businesses in his



community of Clayton, N.C.

"The feeling was overwhelming," says Nicholas, remembering how good he felt the first time he came to a hospital armed with fun things for kids to do. "I saw so many kids laugh and smile, I knew I wanted to do this all of the time!"

Nicholas started a nonprofit foundation. He holds fund-raisers and also uses money from a summer job to finance his program. He speaks in public often and even must manage a board of directors. "It's the hardest thing I have ever done," he says.

"But I know it will make a difference to a child laying in a hospital somewhere who is scared and lonely."

**The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards** constitute the nation's largest youth recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service. Since its inception in 1995, the program has honored more than 75,000 middle and high school students at the local, state and national level. Applications can be submitted online through [www.prudential.com/spirit](http://www.prudential.com/spirit) or [www.principals.org/prudential](http://www.principals.org/prudential), and must be certified by a school, Girl Scout council, county 4-H program, Red Cross chapter, YMCA or Volunteer Center affiliated with the Points of Light Foundation.

For more information, visit [www.prudential.com/spirit](http://www.prudential.com/spirit) or [www.principals.org/prudential](http://www.principals.org/prudential), or call 1-877-525-8491.

## COMPUTER CORNER

[www.randomkid.org](http://www.randomkid.org)

She's only 13 and a seventh grader in Des Moines, Iowa. But Talia Lemman already has created a nonprofit organization called "RandomKid," plus a Web site she uses to raise money for a variety of worthy causes, such as building a school in Cambodia, finding homes for stray pets, and collecting DVDs for soldiers overseas.

"If (kids) want a better world, we need to know that the world does belong to us, and that we have the power to make it better," says Talia.

Right now, Talia is working on a couple of really big projects. One involves getting schools all around the U.S. to make and sell their own bottled-water products to help fund clean-water technologies in depressed areas of the world. Another involves setting up a kind of United Nations of kids that will work together on solving issues that affect kids around the world.

Talia's project started small two years ago, but when she received national TV publicity, she became a source of hope for others, including victims of Hurricane Katrina.

On her Web site, Talia proclaims, "Any RandomKid Has the Power to Change the World." It goes on to say, "Kids often have BIG ideas. RandomKid takes their ideas for a better tomorrow seriously and helps to make them a reality."

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