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Ashley Darnall

Schaumburg High School

Ashley Darnall recognizes there are “perks” to being a volunteer — the respect one gets from friends and teachers, for instance; and awards, like her “2007 Youth Volunteer of the Year” honor from the village of Schaumburg. Those, she admits, are nice.

But Darnall, a Schaumburg High School senior who has volunteered throughout her high school career, says she has come to feel something much deeper.

“The best part of community work is the internal rewards, the sense of happiness and self-respect,” she writes in her application essay. “The little experiences I get while volunteering make it an enjoyable and indispensable part of my life.”

Marvin Leavitt, the guidance counselor who recommended Darnall for the Leadership Team, said she’s simply one of the most extraordinary students he has encountered.

“What impresses me most is how determined she is to make a difference in the world. It is clear to see that volunteering is a way of life for (her),” he wrote.

Ashley Darnall

School: Schaumburg High School

Hometown: Schaumburg

Class: Senior

Parents: Cliff and Hiroko Darnall

Sponsor: Marvin Leavitt, guidance counselor

Community service: Organized a Relay For Life team for two years that raised thousands of dollars; was named Schaumburg’s Youth Volunteer of the Year; works with Adopt-A-Family, Shelter Inc., Operation Snowflake, the Heart Walk and the Make-A-Wish Foundation; organized a fundraising dance for Project Red; academic tutor; worked on a paint-a-thon; organized a holiday party for the teachers’ children.

Melanie Hoffman

Wheeling High School

Nobody thought Wheeling High School could outdo their Make-A-Wish fundraiser from 2005-06, but when the kids got going the following year they outdid even themselves.

It was Melanie Hoffman’s job, as coordinator of the fundraiser, to plan and execute the individual events that eventually netted the group more than \$10,500. Sponsored by the school chapter of DECA, the national association of marketing students, the kids sold T-shirts, collected outside donations and held raffles, bake sales and a silent auction.

“Being part of (the effort) has made me step out of my comfort zone and tested my ability to make executive decisions,” Hoffman wrote in her application. But there was another payoff as well: “With all of the work that is involved, the fundraiser has a reward at the end; allowing us to change the life of a very deserving child.” Or in their case, two children.

Business teacher Gina Zebron said Hoffman has the right approach to her studies, but has something more besides. “Not only does she possess a strong interest in academic achievement,” Zebron wrote, “but she is also a young woman with tremendous character who believes in the value of helping others.”

Melanie Hoffman

School: Wheeling High School

Hometown: Prospect Heights

Class: Senior

Parents: Mr. and Mrs. Donald Hoffman

Sponsor: Gina Zebron

Community service: Has volunteered for five years at Camp SOAR for children with disabilities; raised money for Make-A-Wish Foundation of Illinois, this year as coordinator of a fundraiser that was able to make two wishes come true.

Kellie Kinsella

Fremd High School

“It is truly incredible what (Kellie Kinsella) has accomplished throughout her high school career,” writes Matthew Moore, the director of bands at Fremd High School.

Kinsella, a senior, has been the driving force behind some volunteer efforts — not just a participant. She even created from scratch a student volunteer group to raise funds for the Palatine Food Pantry, with a hefty goal of \$100,000.

“One of the things I admire is her outlook on life,” Moore said. “Her spirit and enthusiasm are contagious, and have influenced countless students.”

Kinsella was sitting in her church pew last summer when she saw in the bulletin that the local food pantry was dry, meaning 500 needy people were out of luck that month.

“That was unacceptable to me, especially in this fortunate of a community,” she writes in her essay. “Trying to imagine what it would be like to go without dinner for a night, I decided something had to be done. No one should ever have to live that way.”

Her parents, she said, have always told her to never take her blessings for granted. “I know I will use all that I have learned for whatever is next in my life. Volunteering has shaped the person I am and will always direct the person I want to be.”

Kellie Kinsella

School: Fremd High School

Hometown: Palatine

Class: Senior

Parents: Linda and Kevin Kinsella

Sponsor: Matthew Moore, band director

Community service: Founder of Youth Hunger Opposition in Palatine; organized fundraiser for family; Grant-A-Wish; Needy Family; at All Saints Church leads Bible school, plays in orchestra, and more; basketball coach; performs with Heart of Music at nursing homes.

Jessica Muszynski

East Leyden High School

“Volunteering has raised my confidence as a leader and has given me a greater sense of compassion,” writes Jessica Muszynski of Rosemont, a senior at East Leyden High School.

The young woman, who plans on becoming an equine veterinarian, is already an able horsewoman. At 17, her Saturday nights are often spent at an equine center, riding alongside disabled teenagers and teaching them horse care. She helped develop the program, which is meant to be a safe environment that allows the teens to socialize comfortably.

Besides her work at Freedom Woods, Muszynski spends 10 weeks every summer as a camp counselor in Wisconsin. She also meets with a group of 15 freshmen every weekday, helping them navigate the complexities of high school.

Jason Markey, a social studies teacher and sponsor of the East Leyden National Honor Society, says Muszynski embraces volunteerism.

“Community service has been an important aspect of her life long before it was required by a school organization.”

Jessica Muszynski

School: East Leyden High School

Hometown: Rosemont

Class: Senior

Parents: Linda and Edward Muszynski

Sponsor: Cindi Huck, counselor; Jason Markey, social studies teacher

Community service: Helps disabled teenagers with equine-assisted therapy at Freedom Woods Equestrian Center; mentor and tutor with ACCESS (A Caring Community Empowering Student Success) helps freshmen adjust to high school; uses artistic talents to brighten school walls.

Michelle Roy

Schaumburg High School

It was a poor Mexican town that Michelle Roy found herself in, helping to run a weeklong Bible camp for young children. As their van turned up a local street, a group of campers spied the vehicle and gleefully started chasing it. She realized, suddenly, how much meaning the camp had for these children.

“The kids actually wanted us there and that we were making a difference in their lives,” Roy writes in her Leadership Team essay. “I was thrilled I was making an impact on their lives — as they impacted mine.”

Roy, a senior at Schaumburg High School, has volunteered at various activities for all four years of high school. Her sponsor for the Leadership Team, guidance counselor Marvin Leavitt, said he is impressed by her willingness to go outside herself with mission trips to Mexico and El Salvador, and the genuine human interest she brings to her volunteer work.

“When talking to her about these experiences you see the true compassion and leadership that makes her so special,” he wrote.

Roy has seen something of the inequities in the world. “People living in poverty deserve a prosperous life just as much as I do,” she wrote.

Michelle Roy

School: Schaumburg High School

Hometown: Schaumburg

Class: Senior

Parents: Dee Cameron and Walter Roy

Sponsor: Marvin Leavitt, counselor

Community service: Instructor at Bible camp for children in Mexico; Relay For Life; in El Salvador, worked at a homeless shelter for 10 days; Habitat for Humanity; organize canned goods fundraiser for food pantries.

John (Jack) DeTrempe

St. Viator High School

After Jack DeTrempe was diagnosed with diabetes, it took a couple of months for the shock and the “Why me?” to wear off. When it did, however, DeTrempe emerged a different person, one who was grateful for the good life he still possessed and determined to show that gratitude by stepping outside himself.

He decided to start a charity to help find a cure for juvenile diabetes. With the help of his brother and his cousins, that became the Alpine Children’s Charity, which to date has raised nearly \$500,000 — not just for juvenile diabetes, but for other children’s medical research.

“Once I began to volunteer, more opportunities opened up,” he wrote in his application. “A simple thing as going to a soup kitchen, cooking food and talking to the marginalized made me feel so good.”

Brother Rob Robertson wrote in his letter of recommendation that DeTrempe has been a role model for other St. Viator students by openly talking about his diabetes, “and by showing us all how to work beyond things that might hold us back, without complaining or asking for pity.”

John (Jack) DeTrempe

School: St. Viator High School

Hometown: Barrington

Class: Senior

Parents: Mark and Cindy DeTrempe

Sponsor: Principal Eileen Manno

Community service: Helped start the Alpine Children’s Charity in 2004; Dash to Cure Diabetes; with student council, helped run charity dodgeball tournament, Halloween and Easter events; at St. Anne’s Church, involved with Project Hope, the soup kitchen and PADS.

Christopher Keller

Hoffman Estates High School

A senior at Hoffman Estates High School, Christopher Keller has spent several years in many volunteer activities, but none made more of an impression than his two nine-day trips to the South, where he helped rebuild houses damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

At one place he helped fix a damaged roof and hang drywall; in another he mudded, sanded, primed and painted the inside.

Clearly, he doesn’t mind getting his hands dirty.

“I have yet to find something that gives a better feeling than knowing that the effort given while volunteering affected the life of someone else in a positive way,” Keller writes. “It might have helped put a roof over someone’s head or given someone a chance to restart his or her life.”

English teacher Kelly Carroll uses the words “reliable,” “motivated” and “self-disciplined” to describe Keller.

“His focus has led him to achieve success for himself as well as contribute to the lives of those whom he has helped through volunteering,” she writes. “I have no doubt he is destined for great things.”

Christopher Keller

School: Hoffman Estates High School

Hometown: Hoffman Estates

Class: Senior

Parents: Kevin and Sheryl Keller

Sponsor: Kelly Carroll, English teacher

Community service: Part of a nine-day mission trip the past two summers to southern Mississippi, repairing homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina; volunteers for Relay For Life, PADS, Market Day; performs in musicals and plays that raise money for Our Redeemer Methodist Church.

Gregory W. Morgan

East Leyden High School

It wasn’t until he watched the Salvation Army truck driving away from his house, loaded with donations, that Gregory Morgan started to comprehend what he had accomplished.

The 300 hours of planning he put into his Eagle Scout project “had finally paid off,” he marveled. “I had collected over 4,000 pounds of clothing that won’t just help people in my community, but will go to help families in need around the country.”

Morgan, a senior from Franklin Park, says community service has become his favorite activity. “I can’t get the same satisfaction ... from sports,” he admits. He recognizes how much he has learned, noting that there’s a balance to accomplishment — the best projects are part work, and part fun.

East Leyden counselor Emilie Reynolds said Morgan’s ability to prioritize his multiple commitments is a real sign of maturity. “I believe this young man has the clear vision, the tenacity, the sound academic background and habits and the independence to one day realize his dream of becoming a physician.”

Gregory W. Morgan

School: East Leyden High School

Hometown: Franklin Park

Class: Senior

Parents: Greg and Kim Morgan

Sponsor: Cindi Huck and Emilie Reynolds, counselors

Community service: Referee with American Hearing Impaired Hockey Association; Relay For Life; helps Kiwanis Club at Peanut Day, pancake breakfast and Fall Fest Parade; cleans up campsites in the Des Plaines Valley Council; Eagle Scout and leader, Troop 158; National Honor Society.

Prutha Parikh

Hoffman Estates High School

“I volunteer for the senior citizens at Friendship Village and the children at KinderCare,” Prutha Parikh concludes in her essay, “but mostly I volunteer for me.”

Parikh, a senior at Hoffman Estates High School, says that while her faith teaches her to give selflessly and love unconditionally, it has been her real-world experiences that have convinced her of her true vocation: volunteering.

“The different people I have come in contact with, from the elderly to disabled children, have taught me valuable lessons,” she writes. “The reward I receive from volunteering is as simple as a smile, whether it be on the face of an innocent child or the wise face of an elderly woman.”

Science teacher Steven Loh says Parikh is a born leader. “Her ideas become the worthy causes other students support,” he writes. A book drive Parikh organized for New Orleans students raised more than 1,000 volumes.

“She seeks out and excels at positions of responsibility and duty,” Loh adds. “Her intelligence and sense of purpose coupled with leadership and strong moral character make her a top performer in our school and community.”

Prutha Parikh

School: Hoffman Estates High School

Hometown: Streamwood

Class: Senior

Parents: Parul and Bipin Parikh

Sponsor: Steven Loh, science teacher; coordinator of gifted program

Community service: Two-year member of Illinois Leadership Seminars, through which she started a book drive, cleaned parks, and helped children deal with death in their families; volunteers with 4- and 5-year-olds; visits the elderly at Friendship Village; National Honor Society projects at Clearbrook, Heart Walk and Market Day.

Lindsay M. Valentino

Prospect High School

Lindsay Valentino says she has always been passionate about mentoring younger children. That passion has led her to such activities as Peer Jury, Special Olympics and even her school’s Student Council Executive Board, where she enjoys “being part of an organization that is constantly finding ways to bring students together to make the school a better place.”

Valentino knows what her future holds: She intends to be a biomedical engineer. Even there, she sees the opportunity to help.

“I can see my future self in a laboratory, toiling with prosthetics and bio-sensors in an effort to contribute to a better tomorrow,” Valentino wrote in her application. “I also look forward to mentoring younger females through the Society of Women Engineers, and am excited to help perpetuate the prominence of women engineers.”

In her recommendation, Lynn Thornton says Valentino does things “for the right reasons.”

“I am most impressed with her character and service to her community,” Thornton wrote.

Lindsay M. Valentino

School: Prospect High School

Hometown: Arlington Heights

Class: Senior

Parents: Terrance and Pamela Valentino

Sponsors: Dr. Lynn Thornton, counselor and TDP coordinator; Kate Moody, college and career assistant

Community service: Special Olympics; principal’s advisory council; mentors freshmen and sophomores, drawing up monthly seminars on topics like stereotypes, respect and goal setting; Service Club; student-led peer jury.

Wendy Wingard

Hersey High School

“If I had to pick one person I know to change the world for the better, I would pick Wendy,” writes Hersey teacher Jim Miks. “I see her as a citizen equipped with the intellectual, moral and spiritual vigor to change the course for autistic children and their families.”

In her Leadership Team essay, Wendy Wingard, a senior at Hersey,

describes being covered with sweat at a construction project, getting clobbered by a recalcitrant 10-year-old with Down syndrome and asking, for the nth time, an eighth-grader to stop talking.

But to Wingard, this is the music of her life. She already has chosen a career in special education, and while many of her activities are focused on special-needs children, she’s giving herself a wider picture of the world, too — mission trips to Mexico, soup kitchens, parish fundraisers.

“Volunteering may not always be easy,” she writes, “(but) I would not be the same person without it.”

Miks says Wingard’s will to get involved seems limitless. He believes both her abilities and her heart will take her far.

“How lucky the world would be if she became a teacher and moved her skills to Washington,” he mused in his letter. “For (Wendy) is the teacher’s teacher when it comes to doing what is right and doing what is good.”

Wendy Wingard

School: Hersey High School

Hometown: Prospect Heights

Class: Senior

Parents: Doug and Nancy Wingard

Sponsor: Jim Miks, teacher and coach

Community service: Counselor at Camp SOAR for kids with severe disabilities two weeks every summer; makes weekly visits to Miner School; with Service Over

Self Club accompanies special ed students to fun outings, Special Olympics contests and more; involved with the Genesis Youth Ministry, resulting in mission trips to Mexico and work at soup kitchens and the Greater Chicago Food Depository; teaches an eighth-grade confirmation class at St. Alphonsus; at Buddy Ball, she helps special-needs children play baseball.