

Seneca eighth grader receives President's Volunteer Service Award

Published: Friday, March 14, 2014

By Nicole Tuttle, Voice Reporter



Seneca Middle School eighth grader Gabriella Pitingaro was presented with the President's Volunteer Service Award by Seneca Principal Todd Distelrath on March 7. Distelrath said that Gabriella Pitingaro was the only student at the school to apply for the honor. Photo by NICOLE TUTTLE

By the age of 8, Gabriella Pitingaro had already made up her mind to become a pediatric oncologist. Although currently 14, she is not yet old enough to officially volunteer at Beaumont Hospitals. This did not dampen her spirit of volunteerism but instead inspired her to find a variety of methods of volunteering, which have earned her a President's Volunteer Service Award.

"I started volunteering when I was about 10 years old, that's when I was allowed to start. I always liked working at libraries or just after school functions," Gabriella said.

The award recognizes Americans of all ages who have volunteered significant amounts of time to serve their communities and their country. It was granted by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program on behalf of President Barak Obama. The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards is sponsored by Prudential Financial in

partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and recognizes middle level and high school students across the United States for outstanding volunteer service. Schools and officially designated local organizations nominated local honorees, and these applications were advanced for state-level judging. In addition to granting President's Volunteer Service Awards on behalf of Obama, the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards selected state honorees, distinguished finalists and certificate of excellence recipients. Volunteer activities were judged on criteria including personal initiative, creativity, effort, impact and personal growth.

Gabriella, an eighth grader at Seneca Middle School and a Macomb Township resident, said she learned about the opportunity for the President's Volunteer Service Award from Seneca Principal Todd Distelrath in September 2013. She applied online, responding to questions about the amount of time she spends volunteering and the type of volunteer work she does, and learned in early March that she had been selected for the honor.

"You apply for it and the principal gets to pick who gets sent over; but I was the only kid, I believe, that applied for it at our school," Gabriella said.

Distelrath confirmed that Gabriella was the only Seneca student to apply for the honor.

"This was an opportunity that we put on our website. It was sent to me. We put it on the website and it was open to students to apply for. As far as I know, Gabriella is the only student that applied for it," Distelrath said. "I think there was quite a process that you had to go through, an application, and you had to qualify. So for her to take the steps to complete the application and then have the resume to make it this far is pretty impressive. She is the only person that took those steps."

Gabriella received a certificate and a letter from Obama stating that she earned the award.

Gabriella said she was first motivated to volunteer out of a sense of justice.

"I think it is not fair that there are some people that don't have all the advantages that I do. So I think that it is just my duty to help people that are not as fortunate as I am ... I have always had a mature sense of mind," Gabriella Pitingaro said.

Volunteer activities such as book fairs, events with the National Junior Honor Society and blood drives take up approximately 10 to 15 hours of time per month, Gabriella said.

She said of all the volunteering activities she does, she most enjoys the ones involving children. Distributing books and backpacks during a book drive at an inner city school is one of her favorite memories.

"I did a book drive where I gave books and school supplies to inner city kids, and I definitely thought that was one of my most favorite volunteer activities," she said.

Rosalia Pitingaro, Gabriella's mother, said helping others has always been a top priority for her daughter.

“She is always asking me, ‘Mom, how can I help others who are in need,’ such as you know, when we do walk-a-thons, breast cancer research walks, as well as even volunteering at local libraries to help children read and whatnot. She is always aspiring to help others,” Rosalia Pitingaro said.

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