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4 NH youth honored for volunteer efforts

National awards: Two were named the state's top youth volunteers and two were named distinguished finalists.

Four students from New Hampshire are receiving national praise for their volunteer efforts.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a national program that honors young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism, recognized Edward Zaremba III, 18, of Hampstead; Colleen Slein, 14, of Salem; Rachel Liff, 14, of Bedford; and Jane Starke, 17, of Merrimack.

The awards program, now in its 14th year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Zaremba and Slein were named New Hampshire's top two youth volunteers for 2009.

As state honorees, each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion and an all-expenses paid trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the top two honorees – one middle level and one high school youth – from each of the other states and the District of Columbia for several days of national recognition events. Ten of them will be named America's top youth volunteers for 2009 at that time.

Zaremba, a senior at Pinkerton Academy in Derry, co-founded the Just Like Us Club at the school. The club promotes acceptance of students with developmental disabilities by sponsoring social events throughout the year for classmates with and without disabilities.

"I know what it's like firsthand to be physically and uncontrollably different," said Zaremba, who is visually impaired.

With more than 200 students participating in its dances, sports activities, talent shows and field trips, Just Like Us has become the school's largest club.

Slein, an eighth-grader at St. Joseph Regional Catholic School in Salem, baked cookies and cupcakes every school night for two months and sold them at school the next day, raising \$440 for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. She learned about cystic fibrosis while writing a research paper on the disease.

"I felt the need to do something, to give of myself in some small way to make life easier for all those people suffering from the disease," she said.

Meanwhile, Liff, a freshman at Bedford High School, and Starke, a senior at Merrimack High School, were recognized as distinguished finalists for their impressive community service activities. Each will receive an engraved bronze medallion.

Liff is a committed volunteer for Special Olympics. She recruits volunteers, mentors and assists Special Olympic athletes, and helps out at games, practices and fundraising events. She also helped prepare a handbook for athletes and volunteers, and organized entertainment for a fall fundraiser.

Starke secured two grants to buy and stock a bottled-water vending machine, which is now generating revenue to purchase water-filtration systems for people living in Third World countries. Every couple of weeks, Starke and fellow volunteers buy bottled water at a local warehouse, restock the vending machine located in a local dance studio, collect the sales proceeds and send a donation to Pure Water for the World. Her Web site is www.purewatervending.org.

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