

Exceptional teenagers recognized in Southern Indiana

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— For the Crockett family of Floyds Knobs, volunteering is a main thread in their lives.

Brenda Crockett credits her spirit of volunteering to her grandmother, who was active in church and always opened her home to anyone in need of a place to stay. Now, giving back to the community is a value that she shares with her children.

“I always wanted them to feel like they are a part of things and that they can make a difference in their community and church,” Brenda said.

While Brenda’s 18-year-old son, Paul Crockett, played some sports, volunteering became his passion.

“I like helping people and seeing people laugh and smile, and I love seeing the help I can give to people who are less fortunate or having a bad day,” said Paul, who after graduating from Floyd Central High School this spring will attend Vincennes University to study fire science and conservation law enforcement.

He volunteers for the Georgetown Fire Department, soccer at St. Mary of the Knobs Elementary School and several other activities that result in five or more volunteer hours a week.

On Sunday, Paul’s community efforts were recognized at the annual Gold Acorn Youth Volunteer Celebration, where he and 24 other teenagers from Clark, Floyd and Harrison counties were awarded a gold acorn lapel pin and a commemorative program with their photograph.

“It’s important for us to recognize that these people [teenagers who volunteer] are doing this in our community and if we don’t, there is no incentive for them to continue to,” said Melissa Harbeson, program officer for Community Foundation of Southern Indiana.

The foundation and its Youth Philanthropy Councils of Floyd, Clark and Harrison counties organized the elegant gala luncheon at The Grand in New Albany to honor exceptional teenagers who go above and beyond for a variety of nonprofit organizations, including interpretive museums, churches, soup kitchens and the YMCA.

New Albany High School senior Leyou Belayneh said that receiving the Gold Acorn Award made her feel as if her hard work has paid off. However, volunteering at the soup kitchen and with Students United Radically for Floyd County — or S.U.R.F. — Board is very important to her.

“It [volunteering] makes me feel better because it makes me feel like I’m giving back to my community, and it makes me feel good about myself,” said Belayneh, 17, who plans to embark on a career in finance.

She explained that S.U.R.F. Board guides youth toward positive decision making. Recently, Belayneh organized the Interfaith Community Council Inc.’s Rise to the Challenge retreat, which the Youth Philanthropy Council of Floyd County awarded a \$600 grant.

In order to receive the award, nonprofit organizations complete the nomination form that is submitted to the Youth Philanthropy Council. The award is sponsored by the Horseshoe Foundation of Southern Indiana, which also gives scholarships to civic-minded leaders and has provided \$31,000 in grant funding for the Floyd County Council since its inception in 2000.

According to Jerry Finn, executive director of the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County, the group is involved with the Youth Philanthropy Council because it is committed to Southern Indiana becoming a greater place to live, work and raise a family.

“We believe if you are going to change a community, you can’t focus on one program and or be guaranteed that any one thing will do it. Real change comes through a community movement,” he said.

Paul’s 17-year-old brother, Kevin, aspires for the Gold Acorn award and hopes to receive it next year for his efforts at his church, tutoring and serving on the Youth Philanthropy Council.

“You see things that have changed in people since you helped them, and sometimes you changed their life,” Kevin said.

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