

2009 Make A Difference Awards Luncheon



Back: Amanda Niemczyk, Robyn Jones, Harry Cousins, Bruce L. Scheiner, PJ Scheiner, Justin Bricker, Dylan Humenay, Haely Jardas. Left back to front: Jillian True, China Butler, Patricia Heron, Alexandra Majewski, Katrina Sommers, Right back to Front: Wally Martin, Caroline Vives-Vietri, Right "V" Haely Jardas, Sarah Merrell, Melissa Brown, Gaelle Colas, Jacob Koral, Sara Leffers at **Make A Difference Luncheon of July 9th, 2009.**

One of the most rewarding experiences for Associates and Bruce L. Scheiner, Personal Injury Lawyers, P.A. is to celebrate those individuals who provide service to their community. It is especially gratifying when those same individuals are young students determined to make a difference – not only scholastically but by giving to others in their community without regard for any form of reward. So it is that the

Make a Difference Program, now in its 12th year, is one of the Firm's most anticipated events.

The Make a Difference Program was originally created by Cheryl A. Scheiner, the Firm's Administrator, to assist students and has grown over the years. Thirty-four students were recognized in 2009 for giving freely of their time to help others who are less fortunate.

Requirements are simple: Students must maintain a B or better GPA and submit an essay outlining how their efforts have made a difference in their community. Once the essays are collected from schools all over Southwest Florida, a panel of the Firm's employees reviews and selects winners.

Students are recognized at their school's year-end award ceremony. Shortly thereafter, they, along with members of their school's guidance team, friends and family, are invited to attend a special luncheon hosted by Mr. & Mrs. Scheiner at which they receive their United States Savings Bonds.

We are pleased to present this year's winners and will share with you their winning essays along with a photo gallery of attendees at the Make a Difference Award Luncheon, held this past July 2009. We hope their efforts will inspire you to make a difference in someone else's life.

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2009 Make A Difference Award Middle School Winners

WINNING MIDDLE SCHOOL

ALVA MIDDLE SCHOOL
CHALLENGER MIDDLE SCHOOL
CORKSCREW MIDDLE SCHOOL
DESOTO MIDDLE SCHOOL
DIPLOMAT MIDDLE SCHOOL
FORT MYERS MIDDLE ACADEMY
GULF MIDDLE SCHOOL
LEXINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL
NORTH NAPLES MIDDLE SCHOOL
PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR MIDDLE SCHOOL
PUNTA GORDA MIDDLE SCHOOL

WINNING STUDENT

TYLER BUSBEE
DYLAN HUMENAY
PATRICIA HERON
WALLACE MARTIN
SARA LEFFERS
ALEXANDRA MAJEWSKI
CAROLINE VIVES-VIETRI
NATHAN MCNICOL
JACOB KORAL
SHELBY SAMPLES
BRITTNEY DAVENPORT

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2009 Make A Difference Award High School Winners

WINNING HIGH SCHOOL

AVON PARK HIGH SCHOOL
BARRON COLLIER HIGH SCHOOL
CAPE CORAL HIGH SCHOOL
CHARLOTTE HIGH SCHOOL
CLEWISTON HIGH SCHOOL
CYPRESS LAKE HIGH SCHOOL
ESTERO HIGH SCHOOL
FORT MYERS HIGH SCHOOL
GATEWAY CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL
GOLDEN GATE HIGH SCHOOL
GULF COAST HIGH SCHOOL
IDA S. BAKER HIGH SCHOOL
IMMOKALEE HIGH SCHOOL
ISLAND COAST HIGH SCHOOL
LABELLE HIGH SCHOOL
LELY HIGH SCHOOL
LEMON BAY HIGH SCHOOL
MARINER HIGH SCHOOL
NORTH FORT MYERS HIGH SCHOOL
PALMETTO RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL
PORT CHARLOTTE HIGH SCHOOL
SEBRING HIGH SCHOOL
SOUTH FORT MYERS HIGH SCHOOL

WINNING STUDENT

BRITTANY MURPHY
MEGAN JOHNSTON
HARRY COUSIN
JILLIAN TRUE
CHELSEY BROWN
HAELY JARDAS
ALASDAIR WATERHOUSE
ADRIANA VILLELA
BRITTANI BOLANOS
ROODLINE VOLCY
CATHERINE EBLE
MELISSA BROWN
GAELLE COLAS
DESIREE COURTNEY
GREGORY ZIMMERLY
AMANDA NIEMCZYK
CHINA BUTLER
SIGNE THOMAS
SARAH MERRELL
JUSTIN BRICKER
ROBYN JONES
KATRINA SOMMERS
MELISSA LAU

Alva Middle School Winner: Tyler Busbee

T Tyler volunteers with the Alva Elementary school and its youth by reading to them each and every morning. Tyler believes that reading is an essential skill and does his best to promote excitement through reading.

In the community of Alva Florida to which I belong, there have been a select few that have changed the way every one of us lives each and every day. Though not alone in my dream of making a difference in the community, I have strived toward this personal goal, and will continue to do so by assisting the Elementary youth at local Alva Elementary in the sometimes challenging subject of Reading by reading to them each and every morning. If there is any question as to how this act benefits the community, then allow these reasons to act as the service to the community by taking part in the shaping of Florida's future adults, easing a slight portion of the ever growing burden that the teachers tackle on a daily basis, and helping out some of the busy parents among us.

A simple solution that can lessen the larger than life list of community honey do's is the act of Elementary reading, which shapes and molds the younger students, and our nation's next adults. If you have ever been told that the future can't be changed, then someone has been deceived because right now, at this very moment, everything that Americas little tikes soak up like sponges can either make them, or break them. Everything they see can mean the difference between our next president, and more names on the jail's attendance sheets. That is exactly why I go every day to not only teach the required skill of reading, but to pass on good habits and behaviors that my parents' taught me, to allow each and every child in that classroom the chance to succeed. By doing this I believe that I have helped in the best way possible, and can continue to rest peacefully at night knowing that I, and anyone else motivated can make a difference.

As I aid the community, the teacher, as well as the students, reaps the benefits. With the economy at its lowest point

in decades, fewer and fewer people have the time, nor the money to lend a hand to the teachers in their effort to educate their students in the best way available. Though this story seems sad, there can be a happy ending, which starts with some time and motivation from adolescents such as me. On school days, Monday through Friday, as soon as I exit the doors of school transportation, I enter the doors of the Elementary School of Alva. Once inside the class, the kindergarten class I have come to know and love takes turns reading with me. I am there helping them sound out those occasional, challenging words that seem to nag at some, but with practices, flow out of their mouths like poetry. These things may seem like an other task, easy on the eyes, but helps the teacher tremendously because the children's reading goal has to be met, while the assignments sit ever so nicely waiting to be addressed. The grades need to be reunited with the computer, and the misbehaved children need their cards flipped. There are parents to converse with, while there are children to supervise. Needless to say, anyone interested in helping out on a volunteer basis will not be turned down, and with me lending a little time and energy for the educator's sake, then maybe the teacher will have enough drive, and coffee to make it another day.

To some reading this, it may have seemed obvious that while reading to kindergarteners, I have helped the community by contributing to younger children, and the teacher's of the children, but let's take a look behind the scenes at the individual, or couple, that may be in a worse predicament than that of another...the parent(s). These people are the damsel in distress that is the last to be helped by me each morning. Parents are the backbone of their child, always there to support them in their time

of need, to ease pain they may have, or to vent to when times are rough and life hits rock bottom. After parents fulfill these parts of their job description, there may not be enough time to read a book, or increase their knowledge by educational means. Being a parent could be the most hard-core job on the face of this planet, and surely one that could use some assistance. What I am saying is, where some guardians leave off, I pick back up on. Reading to these children lightens the load of the parents, and while parents are the youngster's closest friends, I can be too. Some have already started to grow on me in the time I have been reading at the school. It's not always a walk in the park, but don't think I don't get paid for what I do. My payroll is similar to that of a mother or father; I get paid with the satisfaction that I did something right in my life, that there is a reason I am here on earth every day. That to me is as good as any amount of cash.

I have demonstrated student community commitment, or in a simple definition, helped the community by Reading to Kindergarteners at Alva Elementary, which means that I take part in shaping America's future adults, and help in removing a fraction of burden off the teacher and the children's guardians. Part of what I do does happen to lack in helping the community, but it surely helps me in ways I never dreamed, and now I can be grateful for the little things in life like being glad that I had someone to help me learn the reading trait, and that I can make a difference, though it may be miniscule. I hope that by reading this, some may also come to realize that helping one another is not a burden, but something to be about about...something to remember and pass on. Learn that all the problems in the world, no matter how big or small, can be conquered by one act of random kindness at a time.

Avon Park High School Winner:

Brittany Murphy

Brittany is very active in her community through the National Future Farmer's of America. She is also involved in a program -- AgVentures which helps youngsters explore the various aspects of agriculture.

I strongly believe that a successful student is one who participates in a variety of hobbies, from sports and extra-curricular activities to educational courses and community service projects. Even though my schedule is constantly hectic, I take time to be an active member of each activity that I am involved in. This includes my different community commitments through the years. A well-rounded person is one who is engaged in various activities, including events in the community. I am proud of my involvement in my small town neighborhood and happily participate in different activities yearly.

During the summer of 2005, I gave five hours every day to a local church day care. I instructed children aged five to twelve in activities, including mind-enhancing games and story time. I also assisted in planning educational field trips for the children; these expeditions consisted of traveling to the local bowling alley or high school pool for the day. Additionally, I helped with improving the character of the children by showing them God's love and His compassionate nature. By volunteering over one hundred

hours with the children, I realized that Elementary Education is the field that I would like to pursue.

Nearly two years ago, I, along with a few friends, decided to create a Life Teen mass for the teenagers of our Catholic Church. Instead of the traditions of the Catholic Church that we are accustomed to, the new mass consists of modern Christian songs that relate to younger people. Throughout the last couple of years, the service has flourished from twenty attendees to nearly two hundred. Being a member of this eight-person choir, I enjoy showing God's love through music and song and presenting an upbeat approach to worship.

Along with the church day care and Life Teen mass, I am also involved in many community service projects through the National FFA Organization. Being the secretary of my FFA chapter, I thoroughly enjoy participating in events throughout the county. My most rewarding community service projects are obtaining the role as an instructor at AgVentures and AgLiteracy Day. At AgVentures, third grade students get the opportunity to explore the different aspects of

agriculture. I am the educator of one class and take the students to different educational booths. These stands include information concerning the Florida Alligator and strawberries, for instance. I have been participating in this community service project for four consecutive years. In addition, I am the instructor at AgLiteracy Day. This event was created to inform second and third graders about the National FFA Organization and the importance of agriculture in our society. I have also been involved in this activity for four years.

As one can see, my commitment to serving my community is important to me. I enjoy participating in various community events through groups like my church and the FFA. I am involved in these projects not for my own benefit, but for the benefit of others. My goal for each community service activity is to serve those around me. If I touched just one person's life, I obtained my aspiration for participating in events in my community.

Challenger Middle School Winner:

Dylan Humenay

Dylan is very diverse in his community involvement and volunteerism. He is passionate about the environment and works diligently within his community to ensure that trash is routinely cleared away. He is actively involved in fund-raising efforts for Breast Cancer research, Muscular Dystrophy and food drives for the needy.

What is Community Service? To me it's helping everyone in any way that does not benefit oneself. Helping your community can vary from being as little as picking up a loose piece of trash or as big as planting trees throughout your neighborhood. It takes a special person to go out of their way to make life easier for others.

As a small child, I was in Boy Scouts for several years. We had many fundraisers to help breast cancer organizations. Also, we held can drives for poor and needy families. Boy Scouts first affected my life by showing me how I could actively participate in communities and make a difference. My troop was later diminished due to financial problems and I realized I had to take things in my own hands.

After Boy Scouts, I began to pick up trash whenever it was needed. My sports organizations always needed the fields to be cleaned before and

after games, I never second guessed and always volunteered because it was the right thing to do. I still to this day continue picking up trash.

In the following years, I actively contributed to my Church. During the summer I set aside a week or my time to teach younger peers. In that week, the children really learned from everything that I had taught them and it was an amazing experience. Also with the adults at my church I helped the local homeless shelter. First, we donated all articles of clothing that we had outgrown out of our didn't wear anymore. Later, we came back to the shelter and spent a Saturday night preparing their dinner and lunches for the following day. It was very inspiring to see all the bright smiles of the people and to know that they really cared.

About three months ago I helped box canned food for needy families at my sister's school. The can drive was such a success we had enough left

over to overflow their boxes and send another fifteen boxes full of food to the Cape Coral Caring Center.

Today I am a proud member of the National Junior Honor Society. In NJHS we donate time to make the world a better place and to learn from our experiences. Last year, we organized and coordinated our school's field day. This year we baked cookies for the teachers on Valentine's Day. Also we had a successful fund-raiser for Muscular Dystrophy Organization. Later in the year, I will be attending my neighborhood park and cleaning it of all trash for my individual service project.

Community service enriches my life because I know I'm making a difference in this wonderful world. I enjoy helping others because whenever you help you get a feeling of satisfaction for doing something good. By completing community service, I have learned to be more grateful and that giving is better than receiving.

Barron Collier High School Winner:

Megan Johnston

Megan is passionate about community service through the various clubs and organizations to which she lends her support and time. She is actively involved in Habitat for Humanity, Reality Journey - sponsored by Students Against Destructive Decisions; has participated in Relay for Life and is an active fund-raiser for the American Cancer Society.

Nothing makes me feel better than when I can help others and make a positive impact on someone's life. I have always found it extremely important to be active in the community. Throughout my high school experience I have become involved in many clubs and organizations that have allowed me to reach out to people and make a difference no matter how colossal or minute. Service is an important virtue to me and any way I can help serve the community I try to.

I have been involved in National Honor Society I have taken part in many different projects. Habitat for Humanity is one of the service projects I have taken part. This project helps give nice homes to families in need who otherwise may be on the street. The biggest reward is building a home for a family who is nothing but appreciative for the work put into helping their dream become a reality. The children in the neighborhood where we build the homes always have the biggest smiles on their faces as we pull up to work. And it's so great to see the families living in a home that

you helped build.

Another project that I have taken part in is called the Reality Journey. The Reality Journey is sponsored by a club I am involved in called Students Against Destructive Decisions. It's a play that we put on for students in the community every year. It's a realistic play that shows students of all ages the dangers of driving intoxicated. Over the past two years I have lost two close friends because of drunk driving and in one case it was another driver. The loss has been so hard on both the friends and family. I find it extremely important to show first hand how one wrong decision can cost someone their life. With all the peer pressure these days I think the younger the students are that come to watch the play the better because it's important for them to learn from an early age. I feel proud to be part of the Reality Journey. If by watching the play the students think twice before putting themselves in a potentially dangerous situation I have accomplished exactly what I intended.

I have also been involved in many

other community service projects such as Counselor in Training where I helped watch over children at a summer camp for Parks and Recreation, and Relay for Life which is a fund-raiser for the American Cancer Foundation. All of the service projects I have taken part in have been very beneficial to not only the community but also to me. I did not take part in all of these projects simply for the community service hours but to make a difference. If I can better the community that means the world to me.

I want to continue serving the community in college and throughout life. I will be attending Florida State University next year where I will be majoring in medicine. With my degree I hope to help people in need of medical attention who are financially unable to have access to a doctor or medications. The Make A Difference Award would provide me with an opportunity to achieve my goal of becoming a physician. It is my ultimate aspiration to serve my global community in an attempt to better the world.

Palmetto Ridge High School Winner: Justin Bricker

By example to his peers, Justin teaches that even one small act of kindness has a ripple effect that can last a lifetime. Through his various community and school volunteerism, Justin has raised not only awareness of the plight of kids who go hungry in this country each day, but money as well.

"I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." – Edmund Everett Hale

To me community service is more than something to put on your résumé. It is more than just a requirement to join an organization or to get into college. It is a passion; a passion that gets us out of bed early on weekends; a passion that drives us to do things that could otherwise never be accomplished; a passion that makes us think "I am fortunate enough to have a stable life so how can I help others who are less fortunate."

As president of my school's chapter of National Honor Society, I have devoted my time to creating service projects for the club that stay close to home—in our school and our community. I feel that one of the greatest ways that you can give back to the community is by encouraging others to give back to the community. By keeping our service programs local I have shown the members of my club,

first hand, the impact that our work has had in our community, which I believe will fuel their desire to continue such activities.

One particular program that I organized through the club, and which I am most proud of, was a "Week of Hunger Awareness" at our school. During this event, we collected small change donations and nonperishable food items during lunch, after school, and during home sporting events, all while providing pertinent information regarding the unusually high poverty and hunger rate in our own community. Through these efforts we were able to raise about \$1,100 to be donated to the Kids Against Hunger Foundation of Southwest Florida as well as nearly 500 food items which were donated to the Grace Place Community Food Pantry.

In addition to this event, the club has participated in creating holiday care packages for underprivileged families during Christmas and Easter, personally delivering boxes of food to needy families in Immokalee, and holding a bowling fund-raiser every

year to benefit the Smile Train Foundation which provides surgeries to children born with cleft palates.

However, my service does not end with club activities. Outside of school, I have spent several months volunteering at the local library. I enjoyed this because I was able to interact with a great spectrum of different people. I also frequently participate in food packaging drives with the Kids Against Hunger and have assisted in the creation of over 200,000 meals for local needy families. During the summers, I have volunteered as an Office Aid at my school and was involved in a summer service program that explored the inner social workings of our county.

Those who are in need cannot postpone their need, therefore those who serve should never wait to serve their community. Community service is integral not only to a free and functioning society but also to the growth and development of a nation's citizens, creating individuals with compassion for others and a greater understanding of the world.

Cape Coral High School 2009 Winner:

Harry Cousin

Harry is interested in international community service. He helps send textbooks to Rwanda through his Boy Scouts of America Troop. He is actively involved in the redevelopment of his beloved downtown Cape Coral all the while maintaining excellent grades.

While living in Cape Coral I have made it one of my priorities to help improve the community. I have dedicated hundreds of hours to community service through various clubs and organizations. I have accumulated well over 350 hours of community service in the past four years alone. I have helped through various activities sponsored by Cape Coral High School and Kiwanis. This scholarship is very important in furthering my education beyond high school.

Perhaps my biggest achievement has been earning the prestigious rank of Eagle Scout in the Boy Scouts of America. My project continued for three years as I collected used textbooks and videos from local schools in Cape Coral to send to Kigali, Rwanda. This was a demanding project that required a lot of time and effort from me and was the ultimate test of my leadership abilities. Over three years I collected the books and stored them in my garage. It started with a small set of boxes in the back corner, but quickly

grew to take up the entire garage. On several occasions I had people from Boy Scout Troop 8463 helping me sort, count and pack the books. After all of the books had been collected by Builders Without Borders, it was determined that it totaled over 14,000 pounds worth of materials. From there, the books went to a ship in a container bound for Kigali, Rwanda. The shipment took several months to arrive. It was longer than expected due to problems with the country and the constant threat of a hijacking of the shipment. Eventually, the shipment arrived at the school funded by Builders Without Borders, and the books and videos went toward making the first library in that country.

I have done multiple service projects through Kiwanis Key Club, including: helping the Community Redevelopment Agency with the Downtown Street Market and the Food and Wine Tasting events. Both of which I have attended several times. I also participated in Big Brothers/Big Sisters in 2008. Through

Key Club I have participated in many school pond cleanups, Trick-or-Treat for UNICEF, and most recently the Medieval Fair at Lakes Park. I am also actively involved in National Honor Society and Research Science Club. Through NHS I have done several service projects at Cape Coral High School including helping with the Canned Food Drive and trash cleanups around the school.

I am highly motivated to achieve to the best of my ability in my school work and strive to do my best. I constantly come home and complete my school work before moving on to other personal matters. I am highly involved at Cape Coral High School through several clubs including Kiwanis Key Club and Research Science Club. School plays are a big part of my life and I want to continue to expand my education at a state university. I hope to be granted with this scholarship to help further my desire for a stronger, higher education.

Corkscrew Middle School Winner: Patricia Heron

Patricia spends her time helping mentally disabled clients, reads to and encourages children in her youth group to obtain good grades and be respectful of others, and participates in canned food drives for the homeless.

My experiences in life are teaching me that it is better to give than to receive. Giving comes with the satisfaction of knowing I made a difference. Reaching out to others at home, in church and to the community enriches my life as well as the lives of those I help.

Home for me provides a unique learning opportunity. For the past six years, my parents have been managing a group home. The group home is an environment that I love. The clients of my Mom teach me lots of things like patience. The clients love when I read to them and when I sing with them. Even though they are mentally disabled they enjoy it as much as I do.

My church youth group goes to various facilities. The youth group gives away peanut butter and Jelly sandwiches to the homeless and the homeless shelter. We have canned food drives and hand out the non-perishable items to those in need. When I

see the smile on people's faces when they receive gifts, it's heartwarming. It makes me feel great to know they won't be hungry because of my willingness to give of my means and my time.

At my church we have many young children of all ages. We all look out for each other. At my church's Vacation Bible School, I teach the younger children songs. I help them make arts and crafts and just talk with them. They enjoy having an older companion look out for them. I enjoy being an older sister figure to them.

I take pleasure in my schoolwork; it motivates me to be someone grand. I get excellent grades in school usually five A's and one B. Getting good grades shows others that I try my best. Younger children that look up to me always tell me they want to get good grades. I tell them if you put your mind to it, you can do it. My parents are also proud of me and they

expect the best from me.

Some teenagers think it's cool to curse and do drugs and be rude to their parents. Where does that get them in life? How does that make them succeed? I don't do drugs or curse or disrespect my parents. I'd rather be above the influence in my community and spend my life positively. I will always try to help the less fortunate because I am so blessed to have what I have. When I help others, I can see that the thought really counts because that moment stays with me forever.

Life isn't very long so that's why I love to spend it making other people happy. Whether it's at home, in the community, or in the church, it satisfies my spirit and one person can help another. Hopefully my influence on the others will help those I've helped to change others. It just takes one act of kindness to change a life.

Charlotte High School Winner:

Jillian True

Jillian's efforts to make a difference run the gamut from bathing dogs who have survived abuse to protecting Mother Earth from the ravages of neglect and trash. She tutors high school students, shows leadership qualities way beyond her years and helps rehabilitate structures to homes and does it all while maintaining excellent grades.

Hammering nails into plywood that someday may insulate a family's first home, bathing dogs who have survived abuse and neglect and protecting Mother Earth from pollution and buildup up trash are just a few of the commitments I have made to give back to my community. Communities are essential to building better futures and leading toward progress. In order to continue the tradition of supportive communities in the United States, each consecutive generation must offer its talents, ideas and efforts.

As vice president of National Honor Society, I am able to complete projects on a bigger scale with the help of the club members. I have a force of volunteers that can be assigned a duty and finish requests satisfactorily and relatively quickly. I have made friends, but also amazing partners that I can count on to help me serve and contribute to society. Observing the differences teenagers can achieve has impacted me and has increased my motivation to do more. As a leader, I come with fresh

ideas and new approaches to administering the club.

The visits to the Animal Welfare League and Sallie Jones Elementary were of my planning and execution, and my team members look forward to the activities I plan because they feel they are the most beneficial and effective help to the community.

Outside of my work with the National Honors Society, I facilitate book discussions for the book club, Teens Reading And Meeting (TRAM), at the public library, tutor high school students in various academic subjects, and serve as a juror in Teen Court. TRAM was founded six years ago, and I am one of the original members. I have shown great loyalty and dedication to TRAM since the beginning; I choose books, plan activities, and advertise by writing articles in the local paper. I tutor at the library at school and help students in chemistry, biology, math and Spanish. I try to instill the motivation I have in students who struggle. Finally, as a juror in Teen Court, I decide on punishments for

convicted adolescents. I find the legal process to be interesting, and I feel it is important to be an active citizen in the community.

I work tirelessly to give to our community, and the community sends back encouragement and gratitude. Never before had I felt so accomplished and proud of the work I produced whether it be how many volunteers I signed up for the blood drive or the number of times I picked up sunflower seeds off the high school football stadium. After I graduate, I definitely will still have the spirit and motivation to keep donating my services to whatever needs arise. I believe my experience and learned skills will help me establish community service projects no matter where I go. Whether it is holding an environmental conservation information tent at the local fair or going out to repair roofs following a destructive storm, I am firmly committed to benefiting the world.

Clewiston High School Winner:

Chelsey Brown

Working with the elderly, fighting for human rights, the environment and offering her skills in raising awareness for the environment are some of the tasks Chelsey is actively involved in within her community.

It is a cool day. It is a noisy day at Palm Terrace Nursing Home. Activities are planned for the residents and visitors. I forget about the medicine-like smell, stained clothes, and periodic screams as I laugh with Mama Jenkins. She is reminiscing about the good old days. "Honey, be a lady when you dress because my mama always told me 'if you ain't sellin', then don't advertise'", she says. "Yes Ma'am," I say and laugh too.

I have always been taught that you never forget where you come from and give back when you get a chance. The above-mentioned scene depicts similar moments I have shared with the elderly-one of the ways I have chosen to give back to the community. I am both humbled and honored to give back to the community that I am proud to be a part. This is done by aiding the youth, aiding the elderly, and fighting for human rights.

In my community, campaigning for human rights is enjoyable. One of the most recent events I have been a part of was committing to preserve education for children and employment for

the middle class. As a selected voice, I spoke for the people of Clewiston and surrounding areas and made a plea for the Everglades Restoration project by SFWMD to be done somewhere other than the Hendry, Glades, and Palm Beach counties. We desperately need the land to continue life for so many who have made these areas their homes. Speaking to our mayor and discussing solutions to problems and changing disadvantaged circumstances was enlightening.

Positive youth activities are vital in our community. Serving on the board to initiate local events, I have actively advertised and participated in these events. Such events include Karaoke Night, Caribbean Loci-in, Sports Lock-in, College Tours, and Fun Days. Serving as a liaison for those who have never attended these events was rewarding. To see other peers come out and enjoy the activities planned was rewarding as well.

As a camp counselor, I mentored younger children and those who were my age. I would find myself talking to the younger kids about their behavior

and counseling my classmates! It was awesome!

I also tutor elementary school children in an after school program. Tutoring has helped give them a role model-someone to look up to. Being there to be a listening ear or helping hand is what it is all about.

Meeting the needs of the elderly is important as well. Several civic events are held each year. Serving and escorting the elderly at these events has been very fulfilling. It shows the wise and middle age that they are still loved and that someone cares about them. Donating holiday baskets to the sick and elderly at the nursing home where I frequent is also rewarding. Lifelong lessons from those who are older and thus wiser bring a smile to my face.

There is so much to be done in our communities. From care for the elderly, to encouraging our youth, to fighting for those who need someone to be their fighter, the task is great. May the work that I have done, be a small step for man, but a giant leap for mankind.

DeSoto Middle School Winner: Wallace Martin

Providing justice to peers who have lost their way (through Teen Court), offering comfort to those who are struggling with cancer and working in soup kitchens across the country, Wallace lends his effort and time.

“The jury finds the defendant guilty and is required to pay the full restitution of the stolen items.” This sounds like the Teen Court Jury sentencing another guilty soul to restitution. Teen court is one of the community service programs I participate in. I also volunteer in numerous programs within my church. I am a member of the Relay For Life team. I just love to see the thrilled faces of the community people so thankful that many volunteers, like myself, would take the time to help and work for them.

To begin with, I am the Lead Prosecutor for Teen Court. Even though it's hard to sentence people to hard punishments, I usually see an appreciative look on their face which makes it all worth while. However, prosecuting is not the only thing I do for Teen Court. I also help organize court meetings and coordinate all fundraisers. I enjoy taking part in Teen Court because I take pleasure in seeing young adults getting another chance to turn their lives around even if they've had a bad start. Also I yearn to be an attorney when I mature. The Teen Court of Desoto County is helping me to reach that goal by providing me with good experiences for the future.

I also participate in many programs in my church, The First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia. I am a tenor in the adult choir. I'm also one of the supervisors for the children's programs on Wednesday afternoons. I enjoy seeing the plethora of blissful faces after the choir finishes our Sunday morning anthem. On Wednesdays, I help with and supervise the children's program JAM or “Jesus And Me.” I take pleasure in spending time with the children and I believe they enjoy the encouragement that all of the leaders give them. On top of that, I am a member of the youth group in my church. My youth group has been participating in mission trips. We are members of an association called Youth Works. This association sends church youth groups all around the country, and in some cases out of the country, to help in poor or naturally devastated communities. Last year we went to Niagara Falls, New York. We worked in soup kitchens and in homeless shelters. I took much pride in getting to help this community get back on its feet. This year we will be going to Savannah Georgia.

After everything else, I am a member of the Relay for Life team for West Elementary. The Relay for

Life is a nonprofit organization that donates money to discovering a cure for cancer. My mother, Mary Pete, has been a member of Relay for Life team for many years. And I began helping when I was about four years old. Activities I perform are serving dinners to, and waiting on, survivors of cancer and their caregivers for the event. I have also worked at my mother's campsite setting up and cleaning up the camp and running their fundraising booths. I love to participate in all night fundraising activities like scavenger hunts and real relays as well.

As you can see, I participate in many community service and charity programs like Teen Court, which gives teens that, have had a bad start in life another chance. Also at The First Presbyterian Church of Arcadia I am a member of the adult choir, the youth group and a supervisor of children's activities. Lastly with the Relay for Life, which is devoted to discovering a cure for cancer, I am a member and a caregiver. I am devoted to helping and serving my community. As a result, I consider the person that gives the receiver as the giver because I feel I get more out of helping people than the people getting helped do, do you?

Cypress Lake High School Winner:

Haely Jardas

From volunteer work as a sorter of canned goods for local food banks to volunteering at summer camp to help repair homes for those less fortunate, Haely believes that through community service she can bring dignity and a sense of peace to those she helps.

I was in Kindergarten when I went for my first Girl Scout meeting and I remember making t-shirts that matched all the other girls pink with yellow flowers. Through the years the uniforms changed from the yellow flowers, to brownie vests, to the blue sashes the Senior girls wore. Over the years we learned the Girl Scout Law: On my honor, I will try: To serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girl Scout Law. It was a beautifully simple rule that we learned at an all too simple time in our lives, but it stuck with me as I grew older.

I've sorted goods in food banks, volunteered for summer camps and installed dry wall in a house that was built in the 30's and desperately needed some TLC. But the greatest community service I've given had to have been at the Catholic Heart Work Camp. Every summer, my youth group piles onto a bus with our duf-

fel bags and heads off to some city in the country. My youth group has been to North Carolina, St. Louis, and even as close as Tampa. For one week we are completely submerged by the largest community outreach program any of us has ever been a part. One of the reasons why it's so big is because it almost never stops. Teens from all over the country come to these camps; they are re-divided into smaller groups of strangers. The smaller teams are given assignments which usually consist of some sort of repair to houses owned by people who can't do the work themselves. I've painted house before, but there's something completely different about it when you're painting the house for a reason. Then the owner of the house comes out and takes a look at what you've done, and they begin to cry, over a coat of paint. You're not giving them paint; you're giving them a piece of yourself.

My first day of work at Work Camp I came back to the large room we all slept in, and I couldn't remember a time where I had been more tired. Mother Teresa once said "I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love." I worked until my hands had blistered and my socks had left a sun burned line, but seeing the joy on the faces of the residents as they saw the new door we installed or saw that we had given their (unwilling) dog a much needed bath, was worth it all. It changes my life every summer, giving me the opportunity to right some of the injustices that occur in today's world. I can't fix all of them, but I can fix a few. And after I earn my degree in Journalism at American University, I will have so many doors open to me in my only Washington DC, but in the entire world where I can spread the word of the injustices that happen every day.

Diplomat Middle School Winner:

Sara Leffers

Giving is the cornerstone of Sara's commitment to those less fortunate within her community. She participates in food drives; for both pets and humans, participates in church activities to ensure that people within her community are remembered during special times of the year.

"I'm not sure I can afford that," said the lady shyly. "Well, there's no need to worry about that," I encouragingly told her. See at my church once a month we have a program called SHARE. This program helps the less fortunate by giving them food at reduced prices or free if they can't afford it. This is a non-profit program that we do out of the goodness of our hearts. This is just one of the many outreach efforts I'm involved in to make a difference in my community.

For SHARE, we have to get to my church at 5:30 in the morning. Or, if we go to a site to pick up the food, we have to be there at 4:30 a.m. We pick up the food and bring it back to the church then divide it up individually into bags. My nickname is "Bag

Lady" because I grab the bags and take them out, and then hand them to the next volunteer in line who pits the food in the bag. Everyone there volunteers their time to help the less fortunate. During SHARE we also give out free dog and cat food, because human's aren't the only ones suffering, especially now.

Another outreach program I am involved in is The Giving Tree. This program is where people buy toys for needy children. The children tell their parents what they want, then their parents tell the Giving Tree member, then they hang a tag on a Christmas tree and people choose a tag and buy a gift for the children. The people who buy the gifts remain anonymous. This way, the children get what they want

and parents get to see the smiles on their faces and their appreciation.

Last but not least another program I'm involved in is a Christmas program my church puts on every year called Scrooge. I audition for this play every year then we practice for two whole months. This play shows that being a grouch and not sharing is never good in the long run. Without God in your life you won't get anywhere. Your purpose in life is to honor God and even though we're not going through the greatest time right now, you shouldn't be grouchy, you should be thankful for everything you have. These are just some of the many ways I try to make a difference in my community.

Estero High School Winner: Alasdair Waterhouse

Working with Habitat for Humanity, providing companionship to residents at nursing homes, working with the Give a Child a wish project and assisting special needs students at Bonita Springs Middle School are just some of the ways Alasdair gives back to his community. His parents are his role models and through their example this young man truly shares his knowledge, skills and compassion with others.

During my four years of high school I have followed two priorities. I have always challenged myself academically, having a B in a difficult course seemed better than an A in an easy class. My parents have taught me from a young age that I should always think of others first, and whatever fortunes come my way I should share them. Giving back to the community, at school or locally was something I wanted to achieve.

As I anticipate graduation I have completed all honors or AP classes whenever possible and received a high GPA. During the four years at Estero I have always been involved in many community projects. These include, but not limited to, Habitat for Humanity, working in nursing homes, Give a Child a wish project, Teen Trendsetters and volunteering at Bonita Springs Middle School. Recently my classmates voted me the most involved in our senior class. I am the

State treasurer for the student government this year. This position has been a very large undertaking as I have had to organize the convention being held at Estero High school. There will be 700 delegates in attendance and they all need to be fed, entertained and be involved in a community project. I have worked with seven different ecological programs in our area and set up the work we will do with them. We will be cleaning the Estero River, the beach, helping FGCU with their replanting programs, just to name a few.

This year I have spent most Friday afternoons at Bonita Middle School working with the Special education students. I read to them, play games, help with their studies or just talk to them. I look forward to going to their class each week. I see the students in a different way to my every day classmates. They are always happy to see me, they do

not judge one another, and they are glad to be in school. These students make a difference in my life. We, the general public feel sorry for these students, but they do not want our pity they just want our friendship. I enjoy giving my two hours each week to make a difference in their lives. I will miss these students next year when I go on to college and I hope there will be someone else who will be willing to go and give a few hours each week to be with them.

Next year I am looking forward to attending Westminster College in Salt Lake City, Utah. I have already been in contact with some of the clubs on campus and am looking forward to working on community projects with them. Having been the State Treasurer of Student Government will be to my advantage and I hope to be able to encourage students to get involved in their community.

Fort Myers Middle Academy Winner: Alexandra Mejewski

Art is a passion for Alexandra and through this medium she has been able to inspire others to see the beauty in the world. Most of the materials used in her art classes come from her personal cache of supplies. She participates in helping the elderly, the homeless and is actively involved in a program called backpacks for kids that supplies food to those who otherwise would go hungry over the days when they are not in school.

My life has been art since I was eight years old. I have not only wanted to be an artist but I want art to be important to other people. I believe the arts allow people to express themselves. Sometimes people can't express themselves any other way. Art is there for them and for people who admire art.

I am a member of the Lee County Alliance for the Arts and I am so grateful that we have a place to see all sorts of different talents in our area. I have exhibited with the Alliance three items so far and I support Alliance activities. If we did not have the arts people would not be able to create and use their imaginations and then we would not grow.

I am also very active with my church, Broadway Community Church of God. Last year, I started and taught an art class for kids ages six to thirteen once a week. We are a community church and have kids from the area that do not have a lot. They

come to my art class and can express themselves and have someone to make them feel good about what they have done. Their sketchbooks and other art supplies are given by me. We have done art exhibits and we have designed the church bulletin one so far. I hope that I inspire the kids and set a good example for them.

For these same kids I help collect and pack backpacks that we hand out to them and other community kids for school. My family and I give extra help to three brothers and sisters from our church by getting the extra school supplies they need for school.

Also, through my church I am a member of Southwest Florida Outreach. This is a part of our church that serves the homeless and needy in our area. We provide clothes, food and financial help. We have a food pantry that is open six days a week. I work there on Saturdays helping give out food and clothing. I also do some of the data entry.

The Outreach team meets once a month and we plan special events to raise money for the pantry.

Once a year, we do a BIG event called the "Day Of Hope." There is a big gym building on our church property and we open it up to all homeless and needy. We offer clothes, bags of food and prayer with one of our Pastors. The people can also get a haircut and shower if they want. There are tables full of donated hygiene things, sleeping bags and blankets are also given out. This year, we helped over 500 people. We are hoping to open our gym building to the homeless on cold nights in the future.

Our outreach program is important to me because I want to give back and help people. It is important to give back no matter how well-off you are yourself, more people reaching out to others is what we need today!

Fort Myers High School Winner:

Adriana Villela

Helping residents of El Salvador break from poverty to hope is the cornerstone of Adriana's community service. She visits that country and provides hope to those who feel the rest of the world has abandoned them.

My name is Adriana Villela and I am a senior at Fort Myers High School. To me helping those who are less fortunate than I is one of the most rewarding experiences in life.

My family is from El Salvador, a third-world country in Central America. I have visited El Salvador many times and have been heartbroken of the poverty and conditions in which these people live. Lack of food and clothing are two big issues for the people of El Salvador. This lack clearly makes living difficult and leads to children who are not able to have a childhood free of worries and cares. Seeing children with these great burdens on their life was what affected me the most and motivated me to do something to help.

While at home I talked to others about the way I felt about the living situation in El Salvador and how I felt I needed to help. I came up with the idea to begin collecting gently used clothing so I could take it with me the next time I went to El Salvador and

distribute them among the people I met. I began by first collecting girls' clothing because that was the most common type of clothing I had, but I was able to collect boys and adult clothing as well. Throughout the year, I set these clothes aside and by the time I left for El Salvador I had two full suitcases of clothing that I would be able to give away.

I also wanted to be able to take something to El Salvador that would help brighten the children's days. When I was little it always made me happy to get candy so I thought by giving candy it would help make these kids happier. Whenever I went to restaurants I began to ask for the "to go" kids meal cups and crayon packages which I then stored away. Throughout the year I was able to collect many of these items. Before leaving for El Salvador I purchased big bags of candy and filled each "to go" cup with candy and a package of crayons.

When I went to El Salvador, I was able to give always all the clothes and cups I had collected to different people that really needed them. The look on their faces when I gave them something was of such gratitude that it made me want to just be able to help them more. I realized just how petty I can be sometimes when these people went through things I could never imagine and they never complained. Being able to help them and make the kids happy if even for just one day instilled in me the desire to continue helping the people of El Salvador in any way I can. The people of El Salvador touched my heart in a way that makes me want to continue to help therefore I continue to collect clothing and other small items that I can distribute when I travel to El Salvador because if I can just help change one person's life than I feel like I have made a small impact on the world.

Gulf Coast High School Winner: Catherine Eble

Volunteerism brought rewards way beyond what this 2009 Make A Difference Award winner expected. Through contact with a Downs Syndrome Child, Catherine learned how even a small gesture can help alter one's life for the better.

Passing out animal crackers, adjusting wheelchairs, reading "Barney Goes to the Zoo" -- six times in a row, and learning sign language is a lot to do. When you think of a teenager's typical summer day, these events definitely do not come to mind. Approaching the summer of my junior year, the reality of college caught up to me quickly. With my future goals of becoming a pediatrician, I decided to volunteer at a pediatric rehabilitation center called Step by Step. Little did I know my experience at the Center would change my life.

As my days grew at Step by Step, so did my love for the children who attended the Center. Each day would be a different adventure: Monday, I would work with muscular dystrophy patients in water therapy; Tuesday, I would push two-year-old children on the swings. One day, I was assigned to volunteer in the infant room. Though there were only five children in the room, each one had special needs. One little girl instantly caught my eye. She was a Downs Syndrome patient with a boundless smile. Throughout the day, I observed her crawling from one side of the room to another, meticulously turning pages of books

and consistently grabbing handfuls of the other children's hair. Having prior experience, I had expectations for the tedious job; however, this girl came with a dire need for attention and a yearning for affection. The job became more difficult as the day lessened.

After lunch, the children had a period of quiet play before naptime. Hands were washed, diapers were changed, and Leggo's were dumped all over the floor. Suddenly, a deafening scream echoed throughout the classroom. The Downs Syndrome girl was howling and indignantly pointed at the stereo on top of one of the shelves. Nothing calmed the girl down; neither teddy bear, nor doll, or hug would suffice. I felt completely helpless until I realized the significance of the stereo.

Earlier that morning, I taught the girl the "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" dance and we listened to the song repeatedly for hours. Once I played the song, simultaneously the girl stopped crying. Her contagious smile lit up her entire face and she began jumping up and down. I have never felt so elated, nor relieved, in my entire life.

Something as little as teaching the girl a silly dance had influenced her life dramatically. The pride was overwhelming knowing that I taught her something she loved, something she found peace in, and something that she would always remember.

Step by Step helped me realize my passion and drive to become a medical professional in pediatrics. I knew from that day that my future would involve working with kids. The willingness and attentiveness of the girl, despite her disabilities, has given me a drive to be the best I can be and the desire to learn as much as I can. I have realized how grateful I should be every day even for the tiniest of things. Volunteering at Step by Step showed me that I really could make a difference in my community, whether the task big or small.

Being able to volunteer while doing something I have a passion for was a dream come true. Any time I hit any type of obstacle in life, I think about this girl and remember how much she valued something she was taught. I push through my problems for her and appreciate the "silly dances" throughout life.

Golden Gate High School Winner: Roodline Volcy

Volunteering at a rehabilitation center for children with disabilities and those who were abused by their families, taught this 2009 Make a Difference Award winner lessons of love and loyalty. She volunteered at the center and became especially close to two youngsters and they helped shape her life more than anything else to date.

I was a volunteer at Step by Step Day Care, which is a rehabilitation center for children with disabilities. My job was to help the teacher guide and motivate these children as they attempted to accomplish their daily activities and developmental tasks. The real truth is that I was on the receiving end; I was the one who was motivated and inspired. These children have helped me to be all that I can be. They have taught me lessons in the couple hours that I spent with them each day that I was able to take with me outside of the classroom.

While I loved all of the kids, the two who were the most memorable were Cole and Corey, twin boys. Although they were only two years old at the time, they had suffered more emotional and physical trauma than I could ever imagine. Cole's fingers were permanently bent because his biological mother had stepped on them so many times causing the deformities. Corey had one eye that was slightly shut because of being hit in the head repeatedly. You could see darkened circles on their faces where lit cigarettes had been put out; their

mother had used them as an ash tray.

What amazed me about these boys was their closeness. They were always together and helping each other out. Their love for each other was undeniably strong and made me think of my own siblings. I realized that family should be there for each other. These boys together had faced so much in their lives, and it could be seen in the way they acted and reacted when together. My relationship with my own sisters deepened because of these boys, and I hope to always be there for my sisters just as Cole and Corey are there for each other.

The toddlers at the daycare center taught me that just because they cannot talk, hear or even think things through, they are still human beings. Seeing how much the children smiled whenever I showed up, despite the challenges they were facing in life, made me realize how small my problems were. I always walked in with a smile, and I always walked out with one too. My family noticed the difference in me and so I shared my experiences with them. The stories

helped my whole family to realize that life should be more about smiling and less about worrying.

Even though I no longer volunteer at the daycare, the lessons that I learned still remain with me. I was taught to re-evaluate what was important to me and to prioritize. Since effectively learning this lesson I work more diligently and with a higher purpose. This type of financial aid will give me the opportunity to achieve my goals. My mother does not have a lot of money and works extremely hard to support both my sisters and me. She has tried to make sure we have what we need and sometimes gives us the desires of our hearts. Going to a university is a dream we both share, yet it seems sort of impossible. I have worked hard in school my whole life in order to qualify for scholarships. I sincerely hope to achieve my goals and make my family proud. But I am hindered by my financial standings. The scholarship would help lessen the burden of coming up with so much money for attending school. This scholarship provides a link between fantasy and reality.

Gateway Charter High School Winner: Brittani Bolanos

From working to the successful completion of a school play; providing support to our troops overseas in the form of care packages; participating in Breast Cancer awareness week, to inventory work for a local grammar school, Brittani shows us all that one can make a difference just by volunteering.

In my four years at Gateway Charter High School, I have been involved in numerous community activities and other commitments. These activities have ranged in everything from volunteering in the production of a musical to tutoring students in multiple subjects. With each task, I was glad that I could contribute or help out in any way.

In the middle of my freshman year, I had learned through my sister's drama club that they needed help in their production of "Annie Jr.". Always swilling to work on any play, I volunteered for the job. I was at the Gateway Charter Elementary School four days a week after school, for about three hours. From pre-production to the performance was about five months of volunteer work, and I was able to be promoted as the Senior Prop Coordinator. Working alongside the kids and learning the basics of any production, was well worth my while. By the end of the production not only had I earned one hundred community service hours, but surpassed the amount of hours needed to graduate for all four years of high school. My sophomore year, I was able to add to my volunteer résumé.

My younger sister's pre-kindergarten teacher had a daughter who was having trouble in her Geometry Honors class. Even though I was learning the new material at the same time, I agreed that I would do my best to better her understanding and pass the class. We came together and even after the first visit there were major improvements. I even had given her worksheets and notes that I would have received the previous day in order to help her excel in the subject. After a couple of meetings, she was able to pass the class with an A and be able to enforce her new study habits on the rest of her work.

My senior year was also abundant with a variety of activities that I participated in. In October, my two volleyball coaches informed the team that on one of our days off and on the weekend, we were going to have to pull a full inventory check and organization of the Gateway Charter Elementary School's physical education supplies. Out of a team of fifteen girls, I was the only one to actually show up. For a total of fifteen hours I helped them go through and organize every last piece of equipment.

Being inducted into the National

Honor Society, many opportunities for volunteer work and community commitment were available to me. Throughout this year, I've been able to take on a variety of work. In the beginning of the year, the members and I participated in the canned food drive. From this we beat out school's twice or three times our size. During this year, I also continued tutoring students in Algebra one and two. I further participated in the Support the Troops packages and the Breast Cancer Awareness Week and Walk. It was great knowing that our Troop packages were going to bring happiness to the brave men and women fighting over seas. During the Walk, my group and I provided refreshments for the walkers and runners all throughout the race. It was great to be a part of something that supports a disease that plagues countless amounts of people in our country.

Overall, these are the various types of student community commitment I have participated in over my four years in High School. With each activity, I was grateful in knowing I was making a change in a person's life or simply giving a helping hand.

Gulf Middle School Winner: Caroline Vives-Vietri

Participating in food drives, offering face painting to help raise money for a family in desperate need, assisting migrant workers both in Lee and Charlotte counties after Hurricane Charley, giving of her personal items to help others are just some of the ways Caroline lends a helping hand within her community.

I take pride in what I do, how I do it, and for whom I do it. I like to keep up with school projects, meeting my homework deadlines, and staying at the top of my class by studying hard. However, my enjoyment has always been giving a helping hand to my community; there is nothing more satisfying to me than applying my time, knowledge, and skills to less fortunate people.

In the past I have dedicated myself to volunteer my time through different school organizations such as Kiwanis Builders Club. In the Kiwanis Key Club I actively participated in a food drive not only donating my own cans of food but actually helping to distribute them to the Salvation Army. I have also volunteered for the Kiwanis Builders Club at the Kids Fest by painting faces for donations in order to donate a turkey dinner to a needy family for Thanksgiving. The turkey dinner went to a family that I nominated because I personally knew

that they were going through financial hardships due to the head of the household's terminal illness. It was a rewarding feeling knowing that I was able to make a difference for them in their Thanksgiving holiday.

Additionally, when I am not volunteering my time, I like to give back to the community by other means. Two years ago, just before Christmas-time I donated to the Oasis Youth and Family Center (Lutheran Service of Florida) items that were useful to troubled kids of my age. I know that some of those kids are just victims of their circumstances. They may be there for their behavioral problems but they may also have had a horrendous upbringing and they are not entirely at fault. Some of them maybe struggling to correct themselves and maybe in the future they will become productive individuals in our community and they deserve a second chance. Therefore, I took pleasure in showing them my affection and respect by donating new

purses, new clothes, toiletries, accessories, books and DVD's.

Last but not least, in August of 2004, when Hurricane Charley passed through Charlotte and Lee County areas, slamming Pine Island especially around the Pink Citrus migrant worker housing, I want the very next day with my family to assist in any possible way to the hurricane victims bringing them water, toilet paper, cans of food, sheets, pillows and pillow cases. Back then I also volunteered my time with my family at the local church in Punta Gorda to sort out second hand clothes and hand them out to the hurricane victims affected in the Punta Gorda area. I was exhausted by the end of the day, but I knew that my little help was greatly appreciated by my neighbors.

I truly believe that making a difference in my community does not only bring out the best in me, but at the same time it leaves me a great feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment.

Ida S. Baker High School Winner: Melissa Brown

Volunteerism helped this young lady determine her career path. Through volunteerism, particularly in the medical and end-of-life fields, social work will be this young lady's life's mission.

I appreciate life by helping volunteer in my Cape Coral community. I have volunteered in the ER department at Cape Coral Hospital from June 2007 to August 2007, where I changed bed linens for incoming patients and provided warm blankets. June 2008 to August 200, I volunteered at the Child Department Center by helping monitor two-year-olds. I also volunteered at my local Goodwill Thrift Shop and Habitat for Humanity stores from June 2008 to August 2008, where I hung and tagged clothing. Recently, I have volunteered at Cape Coral Hospital in the Central Transport department, where I car-

ried patients to designated areas and discharged them.

During my senior year, the Medical Academy of which I am a part, are starting clinicals. I have received my CPR license in order to participate in clinicals. We are working eight hours a week helping assist C.N.A.'s and surgical technicians at the Cape Coral Hospital and Gulf Coast Village nursing home by feeding, bathing, changing patient's bed linen or taking their temperature and blood pressure. This event affected me in many ways because I knew some of the patient's were dying – a father who has cancer, an elderly woman who was being fed

through a feeding tube and a young man who had H.I.V. It shows that life is very precious and it should not be taken for granted.

My experience has helped me decide on my career goal by obtaining a doctorate in Social Work and minor in ministries. I hope to help people less fortunate find homes, build broken relationships or to help a child feel safe. My community involvement showed me how people interact in the work force. I believe by volunteering it helps build character, communication skills and can make one feel good. I plan to look forward to helping the community into 2009 and beyond.

Island Coast High School Winner: Desiree Courtney

Cleaning up debris in front of abandoned homes, working with local thrift shops to help build confidence in the handicapped and donating time wherever needed, is this winner's goal.

My experience completing community service hours has been fun and very rewarding. I believe I have made a difference in many others lives. As I believe I have made a difference in the way our community looks. My volunteer work includes fifty hours of service at the Cape Coral Police Department and over twenty-five hours at The Kiwanis Thrift Store in Cape Coral.

Over the summer, I completed my fifty hours of community service at Kiwanis Thrift Store. Every day except Sunday, at about 9 a.m., I would come into volunteer and stay until closing. Most of the time there, I spent unbagging and separating clothes then pricing items. I would take the clothes and put them in their correct places in the store. I believe that volunteering my time at Kiwanis

has made a difference because I was not working for profit. Also, I helped people look for what they wanted.

The community service hours I have completed for the Cape Coral Police Department took place back in November of 2008. For about a month and a half, I reported to the Cape Coral Police station and rode with about fifteen teenage boys and a few officers to foreclosed homes with overgrown yards that had garbage everywhere and terrible weeds. We worked until about 2 p.m. cleaning up the yards. We would mow the yard, rake up extra grass, pick up debris and use other machines to make our community look good. The work was hard, but I was glad I could make a difference in the way our community looks.

I believe that the time I volun-

teered at the Police Department made our community look better. When the community you live in looks good, it will attract more tourists. When the tourists come, they will be spending their money which will make our businesses and attractions prosper. In time we will be a bigger and better community with more shops and businesses. With all the good things happening to the community, more people will move in. By volunteering at the Police Department I believe I have saved the city from hiring workers to do the work as well.

All in all I believe volunteering my community service hours has helped the community and the people in our community a lot. I plan on doing plenty more hours in the future to help out everyone to make our community a nice looking, great place to live.

Immokalee High School Winner: **Gaelle Colas**

This winning essayist has “walked the walk and talked the talk.” She has struggled along with her family and has achieved great things in her young life. In the process of struggle, she consistently helped others rise above their challenges.

For the past eleven years, my family and I have lived in Immokalee. Immokalee is arguably one of the poorest communities in the country. A town filled with many immigrants in which many are migrant workers who face poverty. I myself am a former migrant worker who used to travel north with my family to pick crops. Because of my experience as a migrant worker and an immigrant, I know the importance of lending a helping hand to others. I believe that performing community service is the most important of all activities that I've participated in because it is the most vital factor that will lead to change in this community. For the last few years, I have volunteered as a tutor and translator for migrant students who need academic help. During the summers, I distributed books and helped young kids

who were struggling with English as a second language. Helping underprivileged migrant kids in my community gives me a sense of appreciation and lets me know that I am helping to break the cycle of poverty one kid at a time.

Throughout my four years of high school, I have also been an active member of the National BETA club. “Leading by Serving Others”, is the motto of the BETA club which is centered on performing community service activities. Whether it is cleaning up local areas, taking care of the elderly or helping struggling students, I do my best to contribute back to my community through my club. The most rewarding part of being a part of the BETA is being able to see the overjoyed look on the faces of the people I have helped because of the service

performed. I really enjoy BETA not only because I get to use my skills to help others, but also because I know as a member I am making a difference. My passion has always been to help others. This may be a small step towards my dream to contribute to society, but I believe it is a good start.

Giving back to my community is what I love most, and when I leave this community, I hope to use what I have learned to help others in the future. But, now, in contrast of me giving a helping hand, it is I who is asking for help. If I were to receive this [award] I will make sure to use it to improve myself as a person and as a student. I have installed strength and determination to achieve my professional goals, and receiving this award would help me get one step closer. Now all I ask is for the opportunity.

Lexington Middle School Winner: Nathan McNichol

Whether it is the environment or protecting and helping others during disasters, this young man does it all. He has participated in various events to help Special Olympics, Muscular Dystrophy, The Race for the Cure, to name just a few.

Wow, I am involved in the community all the time. I do things such as Boy Scout projects, church happenings, Civil Air Patrol activities and school National Junior Honor Society events. I am a hard dedicated worker that serves his community well.

Do you know what the Boy Scouts do for the surrounding areas? I constantly do service projects benefiting the public. We go to Franklin Locks Park and work a day or two over the weekend servicing their needs. We prune trees, plant plants, mulch, fix park benches, and paint fences and parking blocks. We are always sprucing up the Park for the community. We also help The Lions Club in their pancake breakfasts. There we park cars, bus tables, clean dishes, and patrol the area to create a nice, fun area for the public to enjoy. In addition, I take a canoe trip on the Estero River every other month in an effort to clean the pollution and litter out of the habitat. Flag retirement is a big event I do about twice a year. The retirement of the worn, torn and ripped flags are held at the American Legion of Bonita Springs where a proper ceremony is taken place. Overall I am involved in the community a lot with Boy Scouts.

I am constantly staying busy with the church and doing activities for the public. The biggest event we do is work at the Special Olympics in Charlotte County. This event is extremely fun and upbeat and a great way to benefit the special needs kids and the community. We work side by side with the participants and make sure that everyone is hydrated and safe. The church is a great way that I stay involved with the public and surrounding areas. Have you ever heard of the Civil Air Patrol? The Civil Air Patrol is the United States Air Force Auxiliary and benefits the community regularly. We work the air shows in the surround areas, monitoring the event and making it fun, safe and organized. These events last about two days long and are a great way to keep the show running smoothly without the expensive cost of hiring employees. I am also involved in hurricane relief with the Civil Air Patrol where we supply affected residents with the goods needed to ride out the storm or power outages. The Civil Air Patrol is a different opportunity to help the community and its residents.

Finally, National Junior Honor Society is another way I am involved

with my community. Some recent events we did with the National Junior Honor Society are the Race for the Cure and a Muscular Dystrophy fundraiser. The Race for the Cure was an event that we participated in to help raise money and support the fight against breast cancer in our area. The Muscular Dystrophy Association fundraiser was an activity that included raising money to support the less fortunate people struggling with the disease. We sold paper shamrocks for a dollar and all proceeds benefited the association and their efforts to help cure the disease. One of my most recent activities with the honor society is preparation for the Relay for Life Cancer event. We have been raising money and collecting items to sell and donate proceeds to the American Cancer Society.

To sum it all up, I am very busy with activities in the community and I enjoy every minute of it. I benefit through Boy Scouts, church, Civil Air Patrol, National Junior Honor Society, and regular civilian life. Help those who are in need, it could be you some day.

Labelle High School Winner: **Gregory Zimmerly**

This young man is actively involved in aiding the poor and helps promote goodwill and hope to those less fortunate both in the United States and in Jamaica.

Outside of work and school I consider myself an active member of my community. At church, I have been involved in mission trips, vacation bible school (VBS) several times, and I am a volunteer video technician. For the past six years I have set up and run the video portion of the service every Sunday and Wednesday. I was involved in VBS for four summers and I have been to Jamaica three times on mission trips. In Jamaica we taught VBS and participated in revival services in the evenings. This summer I plan on going on a domestic mission trip to Louisiana, where we will do volunteer service work. I believe that civic involvement is very important and that everyone should contribute according to his or her respective abilities.

During the mission trips in Jamaica it is easy to see how well we have life in the United States. Here, there is only a small percentage of people

who go to bed hungry and even smaller percentage that do not have a safe place to sleep. But in an impoverished area like the one our mission team worked at in Mandeville, you realize very quickly that life is not the same every where you look. To see the hurt in the kids' eyes that walked for miles to attend our vacation bible school made you want to hug them, tell them you love them and never let them go. Unfortunately it got even worse, though. In the afternoons, our mission team was able to go out in the community there and pass out blankets and just listen to the people and let them know that someone cared about them. It was then that we saw up close what daily living conditions were like for some of those less fortunate in Jamaica. Families of five or more would be living in a very small structure that would never even pass as a shed here in the States.

Many of the people in Jamaica

are in dire need, and I believe that is what community involvement is all about. Giving to those in need, when we are blessed enough to have more than what we need to get by, so that they may also live better lives, and do the same for others. I believe that we are all "neighbors" in a sense and therefore we are all members of the same community. We should do whatever we can to help those who are less fortunate than we are, whether they are in Australia, Jamaica, Honduras, or in our own backyard. It warms my heart to hear stories of the volunteers that go to foreign countries to work with disaster victims and even those that go to areas in the US that do the same. These people are the ones that have my utmost respect, and only hope that I might one day have the opportunity to follow in their footsteps, donating more of my time, resources, and love for people in need.

Lely High School Winner: Amanda Niemczyk

Participated both as a donor and organizer for the Locks of Love program to aid young ladies who have lost their hair due to cancer and other diseases and organizes events to help adopt two single-mother families within in her community. Her aspirations are lofty, but in her mind, achievable as long as she continues to donate her time and energy to those less fortunate.

Since I was young, my parents have taught me the importance of giving back to my community. By following their example and working diligently during my high school years, I hope I have made a difference in my community and the lives of others.

As president of the Lely High School Key club, I have undertaken the task of creating and executing projects that benefit the community. During the Christmas holiday, I led the Key Club in adopting two single-mother families, one at the Women's and Children's Shelter and one at Lely High School. To raise funds for this project, I organized weekend car washes on Marco Island. I also co-led an educational field day for the third grade of Lely Elementary. I organized games, such as tug-a-war, water balloon tosses, and three-legged races for the Interact and Key Club to play with the students. The efforts of my hard work paid off when I saw the

joy and happiness on the children's faces.

Since I was very young, there has always been a special place in my heart for Locks of Love. I have cut my hair on two separate occasions and donated it to young girls who suffer from hair loss diseases. In addition, I am currently planning two Locks of Love events – one at Lely High School and one at the Florida Key Club District convention in Orlando Florida that will take place next month. Although my hair is not long enough to donate, I believe in encouraging eligible women to donate their hair for young girls who are fighting life-threatening diseases and have lost the gift of hair.

I enjoy working with the children of my community. During my junior year, I volunteered in two kindergarten classes at Tommie Barfield Elementary School. Although I liked reading and doing math problems with

the students, I enjoyed being a role model the most. When I walked into the classroom each day, the children would jump out of their seats, greet me with hugs and "high fives" and tell me about their friends and home life. Seeing the children's enthusiasm for life and to learn was truly rewarding. In addition to volunteering at Tommie Barfield Elementary School, I assist in classes at my dance studio. Working with children and providing them with a brighter future has always been a passion and goal of mine.

Since I was young, my parents have taught me the importance of giving back to my community. By following their example, I hope I have made an impact in the lives of fellow individuals. With your contribution, I will work diligently to pursue a career in International Business and continue to make a difference through service. Once again, thank you for considering me for your award.

Lemon Bay High School Winner: China Butler

Through volunteering at nursing homes and assisted living facilities, this 2009 Make A Difference Award winner's vocation took hold. Nursing will be her career of choice because it will allow her the ability to continue to help others who are in need.

Throughout my high school career, I have been very active within the Englewood community. In my pursuit of becoming a nurse, I have volunteered in some local organizations that are health-care oriented. During my sophomore year I dedicated some time to acting as a companion to residents at an Alterra Sterling House Assisted Living facility. I helped them with their meals and brought them to their various activities the facility offered. During my time there I was also able to observe how the staff dealt with specific medical conditions as well as general patient care.

More recently I have spent time volunteering at Tidewell Hospice House. It is here that I have been exposed to the largest amount of nursing knowledge. The staff shows me different procedures and explains the reasoning behind many of their health care decisions. In addition, I have met a number of intriguing residents at the Hospice House. Although many of them are in significantly difficult parts of their illnesses, they still offer a broad base of stories and aspects of

fun to working with them. As a Tidewell volunteer I answer the door, show visitors to their family members' or friends' rooms and answer any questions they may have. I also answer the resident's call bells and assist them with whatever they ask. Sometimes I help feed those who are otherwise unable to do so. Other times, I just sit with them and have a good conversation. Besides these kinds of tasks, I help bring meals to their rooms and help with any cleaning or tidying up; that is needed around the building. Overall the experience is very rewarding and eye-opening as far as meeting people in different stages of life.

Aside from community service that focuses on my future career goals, I have also taken part in activities outside of the medical field. For instance, during my freshman year, I spent a couple of hours every Saturday morning working at the Englewood-Charlotte Public Library. Although I spent much of my time shelving books and organizing, I also helped place new barcodes on much

of the library inventory. In addition to these efforts, I assisted patrons in signing out computers for Internet access. Many of these questions I was able to answer when the librarians were way with other business.

Essentially each of these organizations has taught me countless lessons about how to deal with people and the best way to learn new skills. These three services have allowed me to learn what types of work I enjoy doing the most and which I am not as fond of doing. Working at an assisted living facility introduced me to a passion for nursing and helping people. My work in the community has also better connected me to the individuals living here. My loyalty to assisting Charlotte County in these diverse forms has allowed me to adapt to new lines of work as well as unique personalities. I sincerely hope that my volunteer endeavors have had as much of an influence on the people I have met along the way as they have had on myself.

Mariner High School Winner: Signé Thomas

A true self starter, this 2009 Make A Difference Award winner volunteers in her community in a variety of ways and when there is a need and there is no 'program' in place, she develops, markets and pulls it all together to a successful end.

Ever since childhood I have strived to give back to my community. In fourth grade, I founded my first volunteer project, where I taught tap dance to underprivileged children. I held classes several times a week, and we performed at local community functions. As the years progressed, I started having multiple levels of tap classes, and my troop was asked to be part of the entertainment at several annual community events. This boosted the children's self-confidence. Seeing the smiles on their faces is what led me to be actively involved in more volunteer programs once in high school.

Throughout my high school years, I have actively participated in multiple volunteer/service clubs. I am the secretary of the Volunteers Club, through which I have volunteered at the Turkey Trot, Daddy-Daughter Dance, Coconut Festival, St. Andrew's festival and more. Through Mariner High's National Honor Society (NHS), I have volunteered at the Cape Coral Hospital, Habitat for Humanity, Adopt-a-Road, Relay for Life,

many bake-sales, canned food drives, helped raise money for a local teen needing multiple organ transplants, helped provide Christmas presents for a local family, among many other events in which our NHS is involved. I also started a "Thank a Soldier" project at my school. I got all the English classes at Mariner to set aside class time to let their students write letters to soldiers overseas, thanking them for their service and sacrifices in order to keep America free.

But my proudest volunteer project and the one that I devote the most time to is the Adopt-A-Grandparent program. I founded the "Adopt-a-Grandparent Program" two years ago at a local long-term care facility, The Cape Coral Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center. I have benefitted by the personal growth I have experienced in being the founder of this program; in recognizing the need, organizing the project, and fulfilling the steps needed to make a project a success. I have experienced how to take an idea -- develop market, manage and direct it -- until it becomes a successful pro-

gram. I have felt the deep satisfaction of knowing I am truly making a difference in the lives of these long-term care, lonely residents. When recruiting volunteers, I explain that every minute spent is repaid tenfold -- seeing one of their precious faces "light up" when a student volunteer walks through the door is well worth all the effort involved.

While always having a passion for community service, I have never let my grades slip or falter. I hold the number 1 class rank in my graduating class of over 400 students. I am Student Government President, and involved in many clubs at my school. My high school volunteer experience has influenced my own plans for the future. I have chosen a career that involves leadership and that will benefit others. I want a political career at the state or federal level, so I can continue to make a positive impact. Through hard work, perseverance and determination I will reach my career goal just as I did in succeeding with my volunteer program.

North Fort Myers High School Winner: Sarah Merrell

Hunger is a cornerstone of concern for this winner. This young lady works with various organizations to help ensure that no one on her watch will go hungry. She is also passionate about keeping our towns and county clean of debris and works diligently to clean up after those who choose not to respect their environment.

I firmly believe that as citizens we all have the responsibility to give back to our community. As a concerned citizen, I have embraced this responsibility. I am extremely proud of the service I have already given and am anxious to begin new and more pressing projects. The first large service project I undertook was volunteering at the hospital over the summer; it was a very unique and awakening experience. Since then I have joined an urban farming group that plans to tackle the local famine; as well as a project currently underway called Blessing in Backpack. While these are all huge projects, I have participated in smaller, but just as crucial projects, for example this past weekend (March 15th, 2009); I enjoyed taking part in the Second Annual Canal Cleanup with my classmates.

Even though discussing prior service is important, I feel it is more important to discuss future endeavors. Every day in our own community, children rely on the free breakfasts

and lunches at school for their meals. Too many of these children go home hungry from their lunch, but must wait until Monday morning for their free breakfast as their next meal. In partnership with a politically affiliated organization, I will be helping raise money, and canned goods as our community begins the program called Blessings in a Backpack. Children in need will be given a book bag to bring on Fridays to be filled with food for the weekend. Not only does this program address hunger, it helps turn around the attendance problem for these children. This issue of hunger is dire in our own community and it will be my commitment for as long as it needs attention. Another fledgling group that I have given my time (and will continue to participate in) is called Sewn Together, an urban farming group. It will also address hunger, but more so in the sense of adults. The gardens will in the future be tended by adults and will feed those in need.

As far as previous community

commitment goes, the most important service, I gave was that at the hospital. I made many friends with the staff, fellow volunteers and senior volunteers. It was at this job that I met a woman who became a very important figure. While undergoing several medical procedures, she continued to give as much as three days a week. I learned from her that there are no valid excuses for not giving back to the community. The Second Annual Canal Cleanup was an important service project for me, as well. Even though we managed to pick up over seven hundred pounds of trash and debris, the most important aspect of our time was drawing attention to the dire problems we have in Cape Coral. Our canals, vacant lots and roadsides are filthy and we all can have a huge impact on our surroundings if we are all more careful where our garbage ends up. Whether my commitments are hugely influential or simple, I have shown and know that I can make a difference.

North Naples Middle School Winner:

Jacob Koral

Designing logo's to put on shirts to aid in a new exhibit at the zoo, to cleaning up not only his own community but the adjoining beaches, to teaching younger children to read and write a different language, this young man is certainly making a difference.

My name is Jacob Koral, I am thirteen years old and I make a difference. I have lived in Naples Florida for the past 8 years. My family and I live in a gated community called Longshore Lake. I have had excellent attendance and straight A's since the 4th grade. I have played the trumpet in the band for the past three years and plan on playing in the marching band at GCHS next year. I have been a member of the National Junior Honor Society for two years, and was recently awarded the Naples Junior Optimist Youth Appreciation award. I enjoy playing tennis and taking my dog for walks.

My community is beautiful, and I do my best to keep it that way. Some of the ways I help out in Longshore Lake is I pick up trash whenever I see it. I helped plant flowers in the park and I volunteered to keep the playground clean. When there is a storm,

and the street gutters get clogged, I have always gone out to clean them, so the water can drain properly. I have volunteered to help out at the youth tennis clinics, and help the coach with his lessons. We have an annual picnic every year, and I always help with the setting up, kid's games and eating a lot of the food. I am trustworthy and responsible and have a regular babysitting job down the street where I take care of two boy's ages 3 and 7. I have to cook for them and put them to bed, which at times can be a big challenge!

I was the leader in putting together a group of other community participants informing a Robotics Team to compete in local competitions. I designed a logo for shirts, and built the robot to do all kinds of tasks. I even designed the programming to run the robot.

I don't just help in my community;

I help out in Naples too. I am an active member of Chabad of Naples. I volunteer to teach the younger class how to read and write in Hebrew. I also help the Rabbi set up and clean up after services. I love to go to the beach. When I do, I am always conscientious to pick up after myself and others if necessary, to keep the beaches in Naples beautiful. I had the honor this year to help out with the Naples Zoobilee. My mother and I created the logo for this year's event, and donated the design as well as 100 printed shirts to be sold towards the funding of the New Black Bear exhibit.

I am honored to have the opportunity to apply for this award. It would mean the world to me to win. I know that I would represent my school and community well, and with pride. I do make a difference! Thank you for your recognition and consideration.

Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle School Winner: **Shelby Samples**

Whether it is running children's games at her local church or helping give some hope to an Immokalee farm worker, this young lady believes passionately in making a difference.

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world" is a quote by Anne Frank about influencing the world and community around you. I believe that volunteering is crucial for society. Every Sunday I work in a nursery at my church. I also volunteer my time working in a concession stand that supports the local little league. The last way I do my volunteer work is by traveling to Immokalee to help farm workers. Volunteering to me is a huge uplift and an honor to be able to do. I hope my efforts do help to improve the world even if it's only in a small way.

Every Sunday at ten-thirty I open the nursery. I spend around two hours every weekend playing with the kids, handing out animal crackers, and making sure the children are playing well together. The reason I do this is because there are a lot of young

families in my church and without childcare they wouldn't be able to attend the services. The time I spend on Sundays in the nursery is a small help but I hope that it does affect the people of my church and community.

San Carlos Park Little League is where I work concession stands to raise money. It involves taking orders, making food, stocking shelves and counting money. I do it because it helps to fund the Little League.

The Little League is a place where kids can go and just have fun and is a vital part of my community. I play softball for a team that plays on those fields and I want the Little League to survive. Working in the concession stands is just one way that I help support the Little League.

Recently I went to Immokalee Florida and helped the farm workers. Farm workers make nearly no money and have to use most of it for hous-

ing or to support a family. I went and served food and passed out clothing. I had never seen people in such need for the basic necessities (toothbrush, shampoo, socks, jeans, shirts.) The food we served was a concoction of donated tomato soup and corn. While in Immokalee we walked through a neighborhood. This neighborhood was extremely run down and it felt really good to help people who were so grateful.

In conclusion, the definition of volunteer is someone who offers his or her services freely. I do this on a regular basis. I work a nursery every Sunday for young parents; I volunteer in a concession stand for my Little League and I work in Immokalee with desperate farm workers to provide them a meal and a few basic necessities. Volunteering is a great thing to do and I plan to make an effort to do more of it in the future.

Port Charlotte High School Winner: Robyn Jones

Community Service is a passion for this 2009 Make A Difference Award winner. Whether it is raising money for the American Cancer Society, collecting toys for the Toys for Tots program or helping a student who is struggling in school, this student believes that even the smallest of actions can help alter a life forever in a most positive way.

Being committed to the community is an admirable aspect that aids in the growth and development of a person. By giving back to the community and helping others for the mere benefit of the emotion of accomplishment, I have truly expanded my mind, and shaped my character.

Through National Honor Society, of which I am currently president, I have gained exposure to community events and services, genuinely broadening my perspective on how to lend a helping hand. I have worked mostly with the American Cancer Society and the Relay for Life programs. This year, especially, my fellow members and I worked tirelessly organizing projects where the school and community could come together for the "greatest cure on earth." Relay was a great victory. My organization raised a considerable amount of money for the fight towards cancer. My second biggest project through National Honor Society is the annual Marine Corps Toys for Tots toy drive. This year was a great success, as my peers and

I put in countless hours to make it possible for less fortunate children to experience a joyful Christmas. On a smaller scale, my chapter of the National Honor Society began a nursing home project my junior year where we travel to a local house and spend time with the residents making crafts pertaining to holiday events or seasons. This year, the National Honor Society connected with another involvement of mine, Student Government, to make the project even more successful. We made Christmas cards for the residents and also caroled for them. Having the opportunity to do better in the community and my school is a very meaningful and life changing experience.

During my school career, I have had the opportunity to expose and dedicate myself to not only community services, but school ones as well. In the ninth grade, I became interested in sports medicine, and was able to work with my high school's athletic trainer to learn the criteria for this field. From then to my senior year,

I was a student athletic trainer for the football team, aiding in injuries on the field, pre-game taping including wrists, ankles, hands, etc., and committed hours during the week to practice times so as I could learn as much new information as possible. Aside from this service, I was a Key Club member my junior year, where through the Kiwanis organization I participated in various service projects around the high school campus and also within the community. This year, I was a selected mentor for a newly formed school program. Every other Wednesday, I meet with my peers, who guidance counselors have identified as needing a mentor. I work with mostly freshmen who need help with the transition of high school grades, events, how to succeed. I also dedicate three or four days a week to tutoring underclassmen who need help passing a class, or just finding an alternative method of study. I take great pride in all of my school services and extend that into the community.

Punta Gorda Middle School Winner: Brittney Davenport

Taking a passion for *dance* and translating it into hope for others is the hallmark of this winner's community service. Through dance she is not only able to help raise money for cancer research, but she entertains patients and their families as well.

Money, Money, Money! Sometimes that's all people care about but what they really need to realize is that money is not the most important element in life. People should look deeper than that because money doesn't buy contentment. Some like to help out their community without wearing a price tag and that's exactly what I like to do. I have been dancing for ten years now; it has been my passion since I was 4. Once a year my dance studio and I dance for cancer patients and survivors and also participate in the Relay for Life raising money for cancer research. One reason I like to do this is because I love bringing joy to their faces. Also I like feeling good about what I am doing and for whom I am doing it. And last but not least, I like knowing I can make a difference in the world.

For starters, I love bringing joy to their faces and happiness and peace to their hearts. Every year when I get on that stage and look at all those cancer patients and survivors I realize how much they have gone through not knowing if they are going to live to see tomorrow. It then hits me how lucky I am and that I shouldn't take being healthy for granted which I am

sometimes guilty of because life is way too short and can be gone in a blink of an eye. I love dancing my heart out before them as they dance along to the music smiling from ear to ear looking at me with hope in their eyes. It makes me so happy to see them having a good time and not thinking about the worries and pain of their sickness. That alone makes me feel like such a better person and I wouldn't give that up for the world.

To continue, I love feeling good about what I am doing and why am doing it. Every time I dance for them I get this feeling deep inside my soul, it is like no experience I have ever felt before. I love knowing I am helping people who have been through so many bumps along the road of life. When I get finished dancing and they come up to me at the end of the show I look into their tired and weary eyes as they say "thank you, Thank you so much for all you have done; you have taken all the pain and strain from my mind and I couldn't ask for anything more." I then start to tear up and realize how grateful and privileged I am. Dancing for them is so important to me because I take pride in knowing I am positively affecting someone's life.

Finally, I want to know I can make a difference. Knowing as I dance I am also raising money for cancer research would make anyone feel good about themselves. I just don't know how anything else could bring me such happiness and delight. I couldn't think of any other way to spend my free time then helping the ones who need it the most. I hope one day they do find a cure for cancer because I will look back and know that I made a difference and that I helped that happen.

With all that said, I love knowing that what I like to do can be used in such a positive manner. I don't know what could be better than seeing the one's suffering before you have a great time. If you think about it anyone can help out their community because no act of kindness no matter how small is ever wasted. Community service is one way of putting your mark on the world. It should not be done just to announce the completion; it should be done without looking for praise or reward; it should not be looked at as doing something for someone, but assisting them in making life better and fulfilling.

Sebring High School Winner: *Katrina Sommers*

Out of personal tragedies can come wonderful triumphs. This young lady's family suffered a terrible loss but instead of feeling sorry for themselves, they chose to get involved and help others. Hard work and commitment helps others realize a better life.

I grew up in a family that believes giving to the people who are in need of help is a priority. All my life I was taught that giving is the right thing to do, not only as an American, but as a person. This lesson benefitted my life because it taught me that I can always help someone out by just giving a little of my time and effort so that they can get the hope that they have been praying for.

One of the three things I do for my community is help out in the nursery with toddlers at Grace Bible Church. I have always had a nature for being close to little children. I love helping them out. There is more to this minor job though. Three other women and I get the opportunity to teach these lovely children about Jesus. We teach them right from wrong and in the end we feel great about doing this for my church as a little thanks for all the church has done for our community.

The second thing I do is volunteer

for the Brad Doty Memorial Foundation. This organization is put together by my family. Brad Doty is my mom's twin brother who got killed in a car accident 16 years ago. After he got killed, my family got together and said why don't we put something together in order to remember Brad. They got the idea to have a golf tournament to raise money for needy children at Christmas because that is something Brad would have loved to do to give back to the community. So every December since then our family gets together and has a golf tournament and then goes shopping for presents for several families. We, as a family, hand wrap the presents and get them ready for Christmas. We also buy them a ham dinner too with the money from the tournament. When Christmas Eve comes, we wake up at 6, go pick up the dinners and deliver the presents. One of the most memorable experiences in my life is every

Christmas Eve seeing the look on the faces of the parents when they see gifts and dinners.

The last thing I do to give back to my community is volunteer for Special Stars. I just started this year but it is so amazing. People get together from the community and help mentally handicapped people play softball for three Sundays. On the fourth Sunday, we have a tournament. This is my favorite volunteer work because it is not only rewarding them but it also rewards me. Working out there with those adults and seeing them laugh and have fun makes me realize how much I need to value everything I have in my life.

Giving back to my community is a very important part of my life. I feel like I am being productive in this world. It's like John F. Kennedy said "ask not what your country can do for, ask what you can do for your country."

South Fort Myers High School Winner: Melissa Lau

One person made a difference in this winner's life by encouraging her to give of herself. From that first volunteer experience, this 2009 Make A Difference Award Winner has given of her time and talent to help make life better for others.

"In helping others we shall help ourselves, for whatever good we give out completes the circle and comes back to us." - Flora Edwards.

When I was younger one of my teachers convinced me to do something for someone other than myself. I was selfish back then and wanted to do everything for me. I didn't want to stay that way so we planned a day to go to an elementary school and help the kids with the assignments they couldn't do. At first I didn't think it was that big of a deal, but then a week later the little girl I had helped wrote me a thank you note. Evidently, I really helped her in the lesson she was struggling on and she received a B+ on her following test. That's what happened, the need that I craved became overpowering and I knew I wanted to serve.

Since I can remember I have always wanted to become a teacher.

So when I entered high school, I knew Teen Trendsetters would be right for me. What I didn't realize is that when I signed up to become a part of these children's lives, I was more than just a mentor. Trust me, the thrill of seeing that light click is still amazing every time I experience it. I just never thought I would help them in more than their reading work. My students had very low self esteem so in the beginning you could see them getting frustrated and hung up on things they knew were not their strong points. I was their encourager; all they needed to know was that they could do it. Seeing the change in their confidence since the beginning of the year has been one of the most rewarding servicing I have done.

Something that is really important to me is fund raising for a cause. Not only do you raise money for someone who needs it, but it is probably the most fun I've ever had servicing. I have been involved in things such as

the Susan Komen Race for the Cure, along with Pasta for Pennies, where we raised over \$400 and Kisses for Cancer. One that we are very proud to participate in is our fund raiser for Cystic fibrosis. Every year we put on a Turkey Feather fund raiser and each time it's made over a whopping \$500. I feel I am a very competitive person and know my energy can get a lot of people going and wanting to raise money more than the next person. We strive to set our standards high.

Making a difference in the lives of many is something that everyone can do. If you don't donate money, it doesn't mean you cannot help. It is so important to give what we can, while we can. So to me, I don't see it as giving away some of my Saturdays, because I remember that my help may let a child grow up cancer free. Or, give the elderly one less day to feel lonely. I will change the world one day, what better feeling could there be?