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Indiana's top youth volunteers of 2020 honored with $2,500 donation for local COVID-19 response

Actress Kristen Bell congratulates La Porte and Zionsville students at this weekend's Prudential Spirit of Community Awards virtual celebration

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. – Indiana's top two youth volunteers of 2020, **Emily Graves, 17, of La Porte** and **Margaret Dimmett, 14, of Zionsville**, were recognized this weekend for their outstanding volunteer service during the 25th annual, and first-ever virtual, Prudential Spirit of Community Awards national recognition celebration.

In recognition of the spirit of service that they have demonstrated in their communities, Emily and Margaret – along with 100 other top youth volunteers from across the country – were also each given $2,500 to donate toward the local COVID-19 response efforts of a nonprofit organization of their choice. These funds come in addition to the $1,000 scholarship and engraved silver medallion they earned as Indiana's top youth volunteers of 2020.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program, sponsored by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), named Emily and Margaret Indiana's top high school and middle level youth volunteers in February.

"Over the past 25 years, this program has honored students spanning three generations, and the common thread between them has been the determination of young people to respond to the challenges of the moment," said Charles Lowrey, chairman and CEO of Prudential Financial. "Who better than this group of young leaders from all over the country to help identify and direct resources to community needs arising from COVID-19?"

As State Honorees, Emily and Margaret also earned an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. for the program's annual national recognition events; the trip, however, was canceled due to COVID-19 and changed

to a three-day online celebration this past weekend. In addition to remarks and congratulations from actress Kristen Bell, honorees had opportunities to connect with each other through online project-sharing sessions, learn about service and advocacy from accomplished past Spirit of Community honorees, hear congratulatory remarks from Lowrey and NASSP Executive Director and CEO JoAnn Bartoletti, and more.

"We admire these young leaders for their ability to assess the needs of the communities they serve and find meaningful ways to address them," said Bartoletti. "At a time when everyone is looking for optimism, these students are a bright light for their peers and the adults in their lives."

About the Honorees





Emily (pictured left), a senior at New Prairie High School, founded a nonprofit organization that has delivered more than 35,000 boxes of Girl Scout cookies to active and former military personnel at home and abroad over the past decade. When Emily was 6, her mother challenged her to think about how she could use the Girl Scout cookies she was selling to help others. Emily bought several boxes with her own money, solicited donations to buy 600 more, and contacted veterans' organizations to help her ship them to service members. "Active military members are separated from their homes and families," she explained. "I wanted to give them a piece of home, something comforting in the midst of uncertainty."

Now, every year during Girl Scout cookie season, Emily writes letters to companies and organizations to solicit donations, and contacts local Girl Scout troops to enlist their assistance. With help from more than 150 volunteers, Emily purchases over 5,000 boxes of cookies and packs them up at an annual packing event. She ships cookies both to active soldiers and to veterans, and personally hands them out at veterans hospitals, Honor Flights, and at other military and veterans events. In addition to making service members feel

appreciated, Emily's "Cookies for Soldiers" organization is teaching younger students about the heroism and sacrifice of those who serve their country. "Military members and veterans who receive a box or shipment are told that there are people who care for them, see them and appreciate them," Emily said.

Margaret (pictured right), an eighth-grader at Zionsville Middle School, established a charity with her sister that has raised more than $13,000 over the past three years to buy instruments, sheet music and other music equipment for schools and music programs across Indiana, and to promote the importance of music education. Meg and her sister, Kate, both began playing the violin at age 3, and since then music has played a big role in their lives. When their parents began shopping for a new violin for Kate, the girls realized how expensive instruments are, and how many young people would not be able to afford to play music. There are so many benefits to learning music at a young age, said Meg. "We wanted to provide as many students as possible with the chance to be exposed to music in their schools or through other programs."

Meg and her sister asked local businesses for support and for opportunities to perform for donations on their premises. The girls were soon playing at ice cream shops, furniture stores, farmers' markets and sporting events, often joined by classmates and community members. They also launched an annual fall letter writing campaign to attract contributions, and requested donations from family and friends in lieu of birthday gifts. Since 2017, more than 20 musicians and vocalists have performed at fundraising events for Meg's foundation, "Notable Measures." And in that time, the organization has made grants of $300 to $1,000 to eight schools and music/arts organizations across the state, and provided scholarships for three students to play in a youth orchestra.

About The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program was created in 1995 to identify and recognize young people for outstanding volunteer service – and, in so doing, inspire others to volunteer, too. In the past 25 years, the program has honored more than 130,000 young volunteers at the local, state and national level. For more information about The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards and this year's honorees, visit http://spirit.prudential.com. For more information about the National Association of Secondary School Principals, visit www.nassp.org. For more information about Prudential Financial, visit www.news.prudential.com.

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