

Missouri's Top Youth Volunteers of 2021 Selected by National Program

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards honors Columbia and Lexington students with a \$2,500 scholarship, silver medallion and invitation to virtual celebration for their work addressing the challenges of a changing world

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NEWARK, N.J., February 9, 2021 – Shruti Gautam, 17, of Columbia and Karlee Doak, 13, of Lexington today were named Missouri's top youth volunteers of 2021 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, America's largest youth recognition program based exclusively on volunteer service.

As State Honorees, Shruti and Karlee will each receive a \$2,500 scholarship, a silver medallion and an invitation to the program's virtual national recognition celebration in April, where 10 of the 102 State Honorees will be named America's top youth volunteers of the year. Those 10 National Honorees will earn an additional \$5,000 scholarship, a gold medallion, a crystal trophy for their nominating organization and a \$5,000 grant for a nonprofit charitable organization of their choice.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, conducted annually by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), honors students in grades 5-12 for making meaningful contributions to their communities through volunteer service.

"We created the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards 26 years ago to highlight and support the work of young people taking on the challenges of a changing world – a mission that rings truer than ever given the events of last year," said **Charles Lowrey, Prudential's chairman and CEO**. "We are proud to celebrate the vision and determination of Spirit of Community's Class of 2021, and all the ways they're making their communities safer, healthier and more equitable places to live."

These are Missouri's top youth volunteers of 2021:

High School State Honoree: Shruti Gautam
Nominated by Rock Bridge Sr. High School

Shruti, a senior at Rock Bridge Sr. High School, arranged to place free feminine hygiene products in the bathrooms of every high school in her school district, and worked on legislation to require that these products be readily available in high schools throughout Missouri. When Shruti entered high school, she was "taken aback" to learn that menstrual products were only available in the nurses' office. "Far too many girls were turning to unhealthy alternatives instead of facing embarrassment and stigma" by having to go retrieve the products they needed, she said.

Shruti circulated a petition and put together a financial proposal to make feminine hygiene products freely available in her school's bathrooms. Although people close to her initially discouraged her from pursuing this project, Shruti was adamant that "students should be able to focus on their education without worrying about their health." She finally got her school district to fund a pilot program at her school. Between classes or during lunch, she would stock products in bathrooms and track their usage. After a year, the city's school board allocated \$20,000 to expand her program, ensuring that free-product dispensers are placed in every district high school. Shruti also worked with a state legislator on a bill to further expand the program, started a citywide chapter of a nonprofit focused on menstrual health and equity, and has received funding to research the effect of period poverty on girls across the country.

Middle Level State Honoree: Karlee Doak
Nominated by Lafayette County 4-H

Karlee, a seventh-grader at Lexington Middle School, made hundreds of face masks and gave them out to nursing homes, a local hospital, a pharmacy, friends and others who needed protection from COVID-19. When the pandemic closed down her school, Karlee asked herself, "What would I do with all of this time stuck at home?" She learned that some people were sewing homemade masks, and, since she was an experienced seamstress, decided to try making one in her bedroom, just for the fun of it. "I skipped downstairs and showed my mom," said Karlee. "She was so impressed that she posted a picture of it on Facebook." Then, "it was like the floodgates opened," she said.

People began contacting Karlee for masks, and she decided that, in addition to honoring their requests, she would donate masks to nursing home staff, hospital workers and pharmacy employees. For the next five months, she made about 20 masks a day. She also posted a video on Facebook showing people how to make their own masks. "I've had a very cool experience making masks," she said. "It made me happy to help people. I hope that's not the last time I make people smile like that."

State Honorees in The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards Class of 2021 – the top middle level and high school volunteer from all 50 states and the District of Columbia – were selected for service initiatives completed, at least in part, between the fall of 2019 and the fall of 2020. Selection was based on criteria including impact, effort, initiative and the personal growth demonstrated over the course of the project. Several Distinguished Finalists and runners-up were also selected in each state, and all qualifying applicants received President's Volunteer Service Awards.

"It speaks volumes about the character of today's secondary school students that the Spirit of Community program heard from more than 21,000 applicants this fall – most of them stories of young volunteers overcoming the hardships of a global pandemic to support those in need," said **Ronn Nozoe, Chief Executive Officer, NASSP**. "While we're especially proud to celebrate this year's 102 State Honorees, NASSP applauds every student who's found a way to volunteer this past year. You inspire your peers and adults alike to remember that, even in times of crisis, we all have something to give."

To read the names and stories of all of this year's State Honorees, visit <http://spirit.prudential.com>.

About Prudential Financial

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talented employees help to make lives better by creating financial opportunity for more people. Prudential's iconic Rock symbol has stood for strength, stability, expertise and innovation for more than a century. For more information, please visit news.prudential.com.

About NASSP

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is the leading organization of and voice for principals and other school leaders across the United States. NASSP seeks to transform education through school leadership, recognizing that the fulfillment of each student's potential relies on great leaders in every school committed to the success of each student. Reflecting its long-standing commitment to student leadership development, NASSP administers the National Honor Society, National Junior Honor Society, National Elementary Honor Society, and National Student Council. Learn more at <http://nassp.org>.

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