



Press Release

For Immediate Release
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Two NISD Middle School Students Selected as Texas Youth Volunteer Finalists

Gene Pike Middle School seventh-grader Hayleigh Hutyra and John M. Tidwell Middle School seventh-grader Emily Lites are two of the 10 Distinguished Finalists in the Texas Youth Volunteers program led by the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards. The nationwide program honors young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. In its 17th year, the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards is led by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

Hayleigh Hutyra created “Baking for Backpacks,” a project that began shortly after she volunteered to help stuff backpacks for the 4-H. After hearing her school had a shortage of donated backpacks, she came up with the idea “Baking for Backpacks.” Every treat she bakes in the Hutyra family kitchen is sold and the money made from her cookies, puddings and cakes is used to purchase backpacks and school supplies. She started with a goal of 20 backpacks, and since she began her project three years ago she has raised more than \$2,000 and provided more than 200 backpacks filled with school supplies to children in need. “I love to help people, but I just came up with the idea and did the baking,” Hutyra says. “The support from my friends and family is what made my project a success.”

Emily Lites’s younger brother Jude suffered from a stroke before he was born causing brain damage and other health issues. After experiencing many trips to the hospital with her family as an elementary student, Lites decided she wanted to spread a smile to the patients and their siblings by creating “Emily’s Smile Boxes.” She has distributed more than 4,000 boxes filled with toys and games across the country raising more than \$40,000. Lite’s service project has recently branched out to Canada and she has been encouraging various groups to host box-making parties. “The boxes make the kids smile even while they are in the hospital going through a tough time,” Lites says. “It feels good to help others in the community.” For more information about “Emily’s Smile Boxes,” go to <http://www.emilyssmileboxes.com>.

Each of the 10 recipients will receive an engraved bronze medallion for their community service efforts. For more information about this year’s Prudential Spirit of Community Honorees and Distinguished Finalists, go to www.nassp.org/spirit.

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