

A hometown hero: Stafford girl wins national award for helping families stay warm in winter

By Gayla M. Cawley Journal Inquirer | Posted: Friday, September 26, 2014 1:02 pm

STAFFORD — A local middle school student is a national winner of the 2014 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes for her efforts to raise funds for families who struggle to pay their heating bills.

Stafford Middle School student Anna Murphy, 12, created the “Warming Families Makes Cents” project and in the past three years has raised \$10,000 to help heat the homes of families in her community.

“We used to struggle with it when I was little,” Anna said of own her family’s efforts in paying the heating bill. “That’s why we started to save pennies because we wanted to give back instead of take in.”

Anna’s family members would collect their loose change until around Christmastime, when they would give it to the local Festi’s Oil Service to offset someone else’s heating bill. In 2011, when Anna was in fourth grade at Stafford Elementary School, she proposed an idea to her class to collect pennies to help more people pay their heating bills. The idea started with a single collection jar in her classroom but soon spread throughout her school and beyond.

Anna was recognized last year for the same project with the Prudential Spirit of Community Award — a national award that honors middle and high school students for outstanding volunteer service. At that time, she had raised more than \$4,000 to offset the home heating bills for families struggling to keep the heat on.

Anna said that so far she has helped around 21 families in town. She said her own family was struggling with paying the heating bill when she was around five years old and it’s what spurred her into action to help others. She said the situation with her family has improved over the years.



Hometown hero

Anna Murphy, 12, of Stafford, sits on the steps of her home with her 2014 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes award. Anna was chosen for the award for her creation of Warming Families Makes Cents, a project dedicated to assisting local families who are struggling with paying their heating bills. (Jared Ramsdell / Journal Inquirer)

Barbara Ann Richman, executive director for the Gloria Barron Prize, based in Boulder, Colorado, said 25 youths, ages 8 to 18, receive the award every year for their community service work, but the top 15 winners receive a \$5,000 check to support their service work or higher education. Richman said Anna was among the top 15 winners.

Richman said she received more than 400 applications.

“Her application stood out because of the compassion and courage that she demonstrated in deciding to do a project to confer to a need in the community,” Richman said.

Anna’s application also stood out because her own family had struggled with a similar hardship, Richman said. She said she was impressed by Anna’s “passion and sincerity” in helping others, especially given her young age.”

“You take any kind of personal difficulty — it’s one thing to survive that and it’s another thing to take that and turn it on its end,” Richman said.

Anna said her former elementary school teachers nominated her for the award.

“Even if you’re young, you can have a really huge idea that can help other people,” she said. “All you can have is the courage to stand up and pull people together. Even a little penny counts.”

The Barron Prize was founded in 2001 by Colorado author T.A. Barron and named for his mother, Gloria Barron, who instilled in her children the idea that one person can make a difference in the lives of others.

“Nothing is more inspiring than stories about heroic people who have truly made a difference to the world,” T. A. Barron says. “And we need our heroes today more than ever. Not celebrities, but heroes — people whose characters can inspire us all. That is the purpose of the Gloria Barron Prize — to shine the spotlight on these amazing young people so that their stories will inspire others.”

Richman said Anna’s project encompasses what the Barron prize is for.

“Our whole mission is to honor and celebrate these acts of heroism in young people and shine a light on (them) so people can be inspired to follow their example,” Richman said.

For a list of where there are collection jars throughout Stafford so you can donate to Anna’s Warming Families Makes Cents’ project, visit her website

www.warmingfamiliesmakescents.com