

## ***Basking Ridge woman wins prize for heroes***

Somerset Hills in Jersey

Written by Deirdre

December 23, 2010

Shannon McNamara, 16, of Basking Ridge, has been named one of 10 national winners of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

The Barron Prize honors outstanding young leaders who have made a significant positive difference to people and the planet. Barron Prize winners each receive \$2,500 to be applied to their higher education or to a service project.

Shannon founded Shannon's After-School Reading Exchange (SHARE) to educate and empower girl ages 10-17 in Tanzania. She began her work two years ago as her Girl Scout Gold Award project by collecting children's books and school supplies to take with her on a family trip to Tanzania.

Shannon arrived in Tanzania with 500 pounds of donated books and supplies. With her family's help, she transformed a dilapidated school room into a library. She also began a "girls-only" reading program for 23 Tanzanian girls with the motto, "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

Shannon has returned to Tanzania twice since that trip to oversee and expand her program, and has now created four libraries at four schools. Her libraries, which combined house 23,000 books, are available to the entire communities where they're built.

Shannon recently raised \$20,000 to install electricity in two libraries and solar power in another, so that girls are no longer studying in near darkness during Tanzania's eight-month rainy season.

Shannon pays African teachers to stay after school and work on weekends so that girls can practice their reading. Her biggest challenge has been convincing the girls' families that time studying is well-spent, since the norm is for girls to cook and clean in their spare time.

With her newest initiative, SHARE Scholars, Shannon is raising money to sponsor girls to attend a highly regarded secondary school.

"These Tanzanian girls crave and value education -- something my friends and I take for granted every day," Shannon said in a news release. "I want the girls to experience a future of opportunities, which will mean that both their dreams and mine come true."

The Barron Prize was founded in 2001 by author T.A. Barron and was named for his mother, Gloria Barron.

"Nothing is more inspiring than stories about heroic people who have truly made a difference to the world," Barron said in a statement. "And we need our heroes today more than ever. Not celebrities, but heroes -- people whose character can inspire us all. That is the purpose of the Gloria Barron Prize: to share positive examples of heroism with as many young people as possible."