

Community of Character Coalition

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Jaunita Haugen Memorial Scholarship Winners Announced

Two high school seniors have been selected by the Community of Character Coalition as recipients of the 2015 Juanita Haugen Memorial Scholarship. Applicants were required to explain how their actions have reflected any or all of the six characteristics adopted by the Pleasanton school district, city government, and chamber of commerce: compassion, honesty, respect, responsibility, integrity, and self-discipline.

The scholarship was created to honor the memory of Juanita Hagen, founder of the coalition, who died in 2007 due to cancer. Mrs. Haugen was a former president not only of the local school board, but also of the California School Boards Association. Each of the local high schools' graduating classes is eligible for one of the annual cash awards.

From Amador Valley High School's Class of 2015, Saira Grewal is the scholarship winner. She is the daughter of Harinder and Nimarta Grewal. The Foothill High School scholarship recipient is Kelley Dixon, daughter of Burt and Erin Dixon. As in past years, the Village High School recipient will not be announced until their graduation ceremony in June.

Saira Grewal has lived in Pleasanton since age five. From an early age, she has been involved in community service, finding many ways in which to make a difference. As a junior at Amador Valley High School, Saira founded a local chapter of the national SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project. "As a SEED leader, I facilitate discussions about systemic inequities of race, class gender, orientation, and ability, and their impact on school and society," wrote Saira. "The goal of SEED is for everyone to understand the inequities each one of us may have encountered and why these barriers continue to exist."

As a seventh grader, Saira traveled to India, where she spent time in an orphanage for blind children. "The simple joy the children expressed at life, despite the immense challenges they face, made me realize how very fortunate I am," Saira said. She has joined Foothill's Girl Up and UNICEF clubs, "both clubs that work to improve the well-being and education of children in developing countries." Saira also performs with two folk dance groups at cultural events to raise money for disabled children in Indian orphanages. She is vice-president of the Political Ideals Club and also sings in the school's chamber choir and mixed-voce ensemble. A jazz, tap, and ballet dancer, Saira has performed in the district-wide high school musical.

In the community, Saira serves as the liaison between the Pleasanton Youth Commission and City council. She helped to organize the Youth In Government Day where 60 teenagers shadow city and school district officials. Through the YMCA, Saira has participated for three years in the statewide mock government and court system. She has been a volunteer for the very young (Gingerbread Pre-School) and the elderly (Parkview Senior Center), plus for students in the library's summer reading program. She also has helped with the Special Olympics.

Kelley Dixon is the daughter of two teachers and aspires to someday become a teacher herself. Many of her volunteer activities have been directed to helping others, particularly foster youth. Four years ago, she created a Back-to-School Backpack Drive, raising funds to purchase and equip backpacks for foster youth. The first year, she was able to donate 20 backpacks. This fall, she had increased her donation to 41 backpacks, which she delivered to Foster A Dream for distribution. "This has become one of my favorite parts of the year because when I drop off the backpacks at Foster A Dream, I see how much the families appreciate the support," said Kelley, "and I feel that I truly made a difference in someone's life because I see that all my hard work gave them the necessary tools to become a successful learner."

Another project Kelley created is the Teens 4 Teens club at Foothill High School. "I was finding that many students on our campus wanted to help our community but don't know where to go," explained Kelley. Through Teens 4 Teens, her fellow students can assist foster teenagers by collecting schools supplies, collecting toys and board games for foster families, and helping at the Winter Wonderland annual event at which Foster A Dream provides crafts, games, and gifts. Teens 4 Teens also participates in the nation-wide Teens for Jeans Drive, collecting used jeans for homeless teenagers across America.

This past summer, Kelley was a volunteer at the summer school program held at Hearst Elementary School, getting first-hand experience in what it would be like to teach third-grade language arts and math. Kelley credits her own third-grade teacher, Mary Hart Reding, for inspiring her career choice. "The things I learned in her class are things that last forever – loving to read, write, problem-solve, treating each other with mutual respect, and having an overall love for learning," wrote Kelley.

Kelley's other school activities include cross-country track (last year's Most Valuable Player, this year's team captain) and helping organize "Every 15 Minutes," the dramatic program designed to discourage driving while drunk. "In all aspects of my life, I work hard, fully dedicate myself, and have the drive to make a difference in the world," Kelley says.

For more information about how individuals, organizations, and businesses can become involved in the Community of Character Coalition, visit their website at www.CommunityOfCharacter.org. Their annual fund-raiser is a spring luncheon, open to the community. The 2015 luncheon will be held May 13 at the Veterans' Memorial Building. Both Saira and Kelley will be honored at that luncheon.

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