

HEARTS of gold

Awards honor local teenagers

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy

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For two decades, the city of Davis' Golden Heart Awards have served two purposes: ensuring that some good can come from even the most awful of tragedies, and reminding the community that for every teenager who ends up in the news for the wrong reason, there are countless more youths quietly doing good — even great — things for their community every day.

The awards were created in the wake of Andrew Mockus' death 21 years ago. A 14-year-old Holmes Junior High School student at the time, Mockus was killed by a group of Davis teens who beat him, robbed him and pushed him into the path of a moving train.

Stunned, the city responded by holding public forums to discuss the issues facing the community's youth and ways the city could do more to help. In the end, the Davis City Council adopted seven recommendations that grew out of the forums, including the creation of the Golden Heart Awards, which would honor local teens for the good that they do. The awards would be given annually in two categories: overcoming personal challenges and community service.

Many amazing Davis teens have been honored since then, and last week's honorees were no exception.

Eliana Jolkovsky, a senior at Davis High School, and Michaela Saechow, a junior, were the community service award recipients.

Jolkovsky, noted Mayor Joe Krovoza, "is no stranger to this."

Her many years of community service earned Jolkovsky a Golden Heart Award when she was a seventh-grader as well. Back then, she raised money and awareness for Darfur, doing her part of help fight famine in that region of Sudan by sending solar cookers.



JOLKOVSKY
'Personalizes' the homeless



SAECHOW
Volunteers at TROTR



COLLINS
Overcame personal challenge

Michaela Saechow receives her Golden Heart Award from City Council members, from left, Lucas Frerichs, Rochelle Swanson, Joe Krovoza and Dan Wolk.

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ENTERPRISE PHOTOS

"That's where my experience with community service really began," Jolkovsky said.

This year she was honored for her work on behalf of the homeless closer to home.

For her Girl Scout Gold Award project, Jolkovsky last year embarked on a mission to photograph and tell the stories of the homeless living in Davis, Woodland and Sacramento. She would later display her photos along with biographical information on her subjects in an exhibit at International House of Davis.

Her goal was to personalize the homeless, she said, to remind people that they are human beings with their own stories.

In addition to the exhibit, Jolkovsky also collected donations for "to go" bags that could be handed out to homeless individuals at local shelters. The bags contained everything from toothbrushes to water bottles, socks to hand wipes.

She collected so many items that she is still handing out "to go" bags from the trunk of her car whenever she sees a homeless person.

"The looks on their faces are just the best," she said.

Jolkovsky was nominated for the Golden Heart Award by family friend Marjorie Maxwell, who called the teen "one of those

people who has the motivation, intelligence and talent to do good."

"She's able to accomplish many different things," Maxwell said, "and with wonderful humility and grace."

For her part, Jolkovsky hopes she inspires others to community service and remains enormously thankful to her parents, Ann and David Jolkovsky, who "support me in everything I do," she said. "I'm really grateful for having such great parents."

Michaela Saechow has great parents as well.

She "comes from a wonderful family," Krovoza said.

For the past five years, the DHS junior has been devoting enormous amounts of time to TROTR, a volunteer-based organization located between Davis and Woodland that rehabilitates retired race horses and runs a therapeutic riding program for people with physical, mental and emotional disabilities.

Saechow does everything from grooming horses and mucking stables to teaching volunteers and helping the disabled ride. She knows just how beneficial the service is.

"Horses are probably the most therapeutic animal you can find," she said. "They're

just great teachers. They teach you how to find yourself, and it's really calming.

"When I first started, there were kids who came out who could barely walk ... now they run around and jump and play. It's magical."

Saechow is out there every weekend and most days after school. For her efforts, she was nominated for the Golden Heart Award by her mother, Tina.

But her parents were the first people Saechow thanked upon receiving the award.

"I'm so grateful for the countless hours they spent driving me out there," she said.

DHS senior Cody Collins was this year's recipient of the Golden Heart Award for overcoming a personal challenge.

Collins abruptly lost vision in his right eye when he was in the eighth grade. It was later determined he suffered from a syndrome that can cause the retina to detach, which is exactly what happened to his right eye and could still happen to his left.

He's had several surgeries, learned to read Braille, walk with a cane and work with a guide dog.

But his "upbeat attitude" that always shines through inspires everyone around him, which is why he was recognized with a Golden Heart Award.

Collins acknowledges that "it's been pretty tough the last few years."

But he's maintained his sense of humor, joking that he just has to turn his head more than most people, to catch things on his right.

"I live a normal life," he added. "I just can't see out of my right eye."

Like the other Golden Heart Award recipients, he was quick to thank his family and friends for their ongoing support.

Anyone in the community can nominate a deserving teen for a Golden Heart Award. Watch for announcements about next year's awards this fall.

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