

Middletown News



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Three Township Students Earn Top Honors for Community Service

MIDDLETOWN – Three Middletown students were named top honorees in the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program. The nationwide program honors young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism.

Matthew Erickson, Michael Ruane and Erika Rech represent three of the eight New Jersey residents recognized by the program this year. The Township Committee commended the students for their impressive community service activities during the April meeting.

"The fact nearly 40 percent of the New Jersey students honored by the program are from Middletown speaks volumes about the wonderful caliber of our young people," said Mayor Gerard P. Scharfenberger. "Matthew, Michael and Erika are the embodiment of the township's enormous volunteer spirit. I am very proud that the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program has recognized each of them for their admirable volunteer contributions."

Matthew Erickson, 17, a senior at Mater Dei High School, co-founded "HelpLight NJ," a volunteer effort that has raised money to replace 82,000 incandescent light bulbs with energy-saving compact fluorescent bulbs for 13,000 families. Students at 19 high schools now participate in Matthew's program. Learn more about the program at www.helplightnj.com

Erika Rech, 18, a senior at High Technology High School, and Michael Ruane, 18, a senior at Middletown High School North, have raised more than \$100,000 to help breast cancer patients undergoing financial hardship pay for wigs, prostheses, medication, doctor visits, groceries, and many other items. The two cousins have sold T-shirts, solicited donations from local businesses, collected coins in front of local supermarkets, and organized a black tie gala and auction to raise their funds. Learn more about the program at www.breastfriendsforever.org.

Erika and Michael were also selected as Paving the Way Hometown Heroes by the American Red Cross Jersey Coast Chapter this year. Paving the Way Heroes are individuals under the age of 21 who selflessly responded to a crisis situation and/or worked towards making a difference in our world.

All public and private middle level and high schools, Girl Scout councils, county 4-H organizations, American Red Cross chapters, YMCAs and affiliates of HandsOn Network nationwide were eligible to select a student or member for a local Prudential Spirit of Community Award this past November. Nearly 5,000 Local Honorees were then reviewed by an independent judging panel, which selected State Honorees and Distinguished Finalists based on criteria such as personal initiative, creativity, effort, impact and personal growth.

Proclamations

- Erika Rech
- Michael Ruane
- Matthew Erickson



HelpLight NJ Co-founder Matthew Erickson, Breast Friends Forever Founders Erika Rech and Michael Ruane with Mayor Gerry Scharfenberger. All three young residents were finalists in the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program