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Shelton student loves community service

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Ava Mackey a big reason CYC art contest has grown in popularity

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Whether it's packing boxes of food and clothes for the needy, dressing up as a goose to entertain children or organizing a community art contest, Ava Mackey of Shelton is all about community service.

"If you grow up in it, it becomes habit," said the 16-year-old junior from Heartland Lutheran High School in Grand Island. "You don't think anything of it."

Mackey commented as she used part of the time of her Christmas break to help remove art from the walls of the Grand Island Public Library art alcove.

It's the same art she helped put up a month ago as part of the Community Youth Council's "Create Your Community Art Contest."

Mackey and Garrett Coble of Central Catholic High School co-chaired the contest to a record level of more than 135 participants from area elementary, middle and high school students.

"Due in a large part to their leadership, the art contest received five times as many entries as the first art contest that was held last year," said city spokeswoman Wendy Meyer-Jerke, an adviser to the CYC.

"With such an increase in entries it led to some challenges the CYC had not thought of," Meyer-Jerke said. "Ava helped keep the group on track. She focused on the things that needed to be done to make the contest come together in a successful and professional manner."

Mackey said the large response taught her the importance of organization and staying on track.

"You have to be more strict on yourself to get it done," Mackey said. "You need to organize your day ... it's a self-discipline thing."

While her leadership by example has been honed in the CYC — Grand Island's select team of teen do-gooders — it all started at home.

"Church is how I started in community service," Mackey said.

Her father, Tom Mackey, is a carpenter and pastor at St. Paul's Lutheran in Shelton.

The young Mackey recalls participating in many 30-hour famines followed by camp cleanups at Camp Luther by



Ava Mackey removes entries from the CYC art contest at the Grand Island Public Library. Entries were recently on display after judging. (Laura Beahm/For The Independent)

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Schuyler and working the Orphan Grain Train by helping pack boxes of food and clothing for the needy in other countries. She has also helped at the Hastings homeless shelter and is enamored at the stories of the people there — many of whom just need to “catch a break,” she said.

The entire Mackey family is giving and helpful and has helped with CYC projects such as road cleanups and the Family Day in the Park or Movie Night in the Park, held during the summer at Stolley Park.

“She’s very good at volunteering, not only her own time, but her family’s,” said CYC sponsor Celine Stahlnecker.

Mackey’s mom, Shirley, made costumes for the Movie Night, including a goose costume that Mackey wore in front of 500 people who attended the summer park party.

“If we can provide someone a little bit of joy — why wouldn’t we do it?” Mackey said matter-of-factly.

It’s a helping attitude that comes backed by evolving leadership skills, the CYC sponsors said.

“She’s just really grown,” Stahlnecker said. “She’s dependable and has lots of enthusiasm.”

The fact that Mackey is in a key leadership role as a junior is a testament to her reputable work, Stahlnecker said.

She’s gone from one waiting for assignments as a sophomore member of CYC to the one “putting plans in action,” Meyer-Jerke said.

“When I hear the name Ava Mackey, a smile just naturally comes to my face,” Meyer-Jerke said. “She has a flair all her own. Her enthusiasm is contagious, and at times she even keeps me going when challenges are lurking in the midst of planning a Community Youth Council activity or event.”

She also has great follow-up skills, she said.

Meyer-Jerke said Mackey’s peers naturally follow her because she bestows confidence in others through encouraging words and she makes things fun.

“She does a great job of listening to everyone’s input and then leading the group in the right direction based on the wants and needs of the CYC members and our community,” Meyer-Jerke said.

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