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Local Girl Scouts earn Gold Awards

By John T. Miller



Left to right: Erica Stephan, Kyra Merryman, Kiera Crandall and Lauren Holloway Photo John T. Miller

Four area Girl Scouts earned the prestigious Gold Award just prior to their graduation from high school. Kiera Crandall, Lauren Holloway and Kyra Merryman of Campolindo and Erica Stephan of Miramonte achieved the highest award bestowed upon an outgoing Girl Scout.

One other area senior, Maria Wong of Campolindo is working on completing her project: "Awareness and Prevention of Sexual Assault among Youth."

The award - equivalent to the Eagle Scout in Boys Scouts - represents an independent project that will, according to their website, "change the world, or at least your corner of it, and solve a community problem, not only in the short term but for years in the future."

The Gold Award must be done independently and represent at least 80 hours of work. An advisor from the host organization, along with a Girl Scout advisor oversees the activity, and a lengthy write-up of the program is submitted at the project's close. Only about 3 percent of Girl Scouts nationally complete the Gold Award.

Crandall wrote, directed and edited a set of five videos for the "Character Counts" program at Kimball Elementary in Antioch, a school with a high percentage of children from low-income families. She also created corresponding activities for the program that teachers can use for years to come to help model appropriate behavior in social situations.

Her YouTube examples demonstrated desired behaviors such as respect, responsibility, fairness, trustworthiness, and citizenship, and, whenever possible, she involved the students in the process of filming the videos.

Holloway developed "A Library for Contra Costa Interfaith Housing," a project she hoped would "help the children who didn't like reading or who had trouble reading to have a higher chance of success."

She expanded on her previous experience through her church of working with children at the CCIH in Concord to develop a library for their afterschool program. "They had some books," she said, "but no library."

She created a checkout system, organized the books by age level, gathered about 300 new or gently used books, and started a book club. Volunteers will keep up the checkout system and continue the book club.

Her project serves the Lakeside Apartments, a low-income housing unit at the end of the Monument Corridor, home to 124 households including 16 families with special needs.

An interest in science prompted Kiera Merryman to develop a "Youth in Science Program" at Wren Avenue Elementary School in Concord. "I knew I wanted to do something with education and youth," she said, "but I wasn't sure what."

The past summer spent at UCSD studying marine biology accelerated her interest in science, and working with the Students in Action Club at Campolindo called attention to community service, leading her to work at the school where their science program was severely underfunded.

Over the course of two months, she introduced fourth and fifth grade students to six different fields of science in their afterschool program. "It was cool to see them work in a new lab environment because they'd never had a class like that," said Merryman. She organized the program so that volunteers can continue to use the packets she developed to work with the next group of students.

Erica Stephan expanded on her role as a volunteer with the Aspire Education Project where she worked one-on-one with disadvantaged students to improve academic performance, created a garden, painted a mural, and collected over 200 books for a "Head Start on Learning" program in the Fruitvale area of Oakland.

"Improving lives and providing equal opportunities in education are very important to me," she said.

The garden is composed of mostly perennial plants, while the mural focuses on healthy eating habits. The

books will become a permanent part of the library collection. Stephan plans to go back and see how the garden is doing, but says, "It was made to last without me."

All of the students will be moving on, but their projects were designed to be sustainable and continue without them. Both Crandall and Merryman plan on attending Diablo Valley College before transferring to four-year schools. Holloway will attend Loyola Marymount in Southern California, and Stephan will participate in a joint program with the College of William and Mary in Virginia and the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

Reach the reporter at: john@lamorindaweekly.com

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