

Teen's community work lauded

Last year, Laurel Marshalek, now a senior at Bentworth High School, completed an impressive 270 hours of community service.

Marshalek is involved with the Bentleyville Leo Club, a youth division of the Lions Club, through which she is able to volunteer her time to projects at the city mission, veterans center and local elementary school.

She also is a member of her church youth group, which assists in projects such as serving meals to the homeless, making blankets for underprivileged children and assisting Bentleyville's elderly community.

Volunteering is a big commitment for any modern high school student, but it is especially stressful for students like Marshalek, who already are extremely active in their high schools. Marshalek is involved with a plethora of activities every season of the year, including softball, basketball, soccer, the musical, band, chorus and National Honors Society.

She also holds a weekend job at The Springhouse in Eighty Four, Washington County.
"It's all about time management,"



THE CHALLENGE PROGRAM
Kayla Washko

Marshalek explained, "I think it's good for teens to get involved, because it helps them to realize that they can make a difference."

To emphasize this idea, Marshalek pinpointed a personal experience that made her feel like she had made a difference in someone's life.

"One time a few others and I helped a family celebrate Christmas for the first time," Marshalek said.

"They were a family of five children and a single mother, and they never celebrated the holiday before. We had to take them out to dinner, put up a tree, decorate it, hang lights outside and wrap presents
"It was a moving and heartwarming

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LAUREL MARSHALEK, CHALLENGE PROGRAM AWARD RECIPIENT

experience for everyone. I had never realized how close we really are to people who are less fortunate than us."

Chuck Dreer of Progeny Systems Inc. is the business ambassador to Bentleyville High School, and he believes that community service has become more important than ever to employers.

"We're not looking just at resumes anymore," Dreer said. "Anyone can write one of those. What we're looking for now is character and well-roundedness, and (community service) is part of that. We're looking for people to be part of our company and part of our community."

He also stressed that The Challenge Program is a great way to develop an awareness in high school students of being well-rounded.

Marshalek is a 2007 winner of The Challenge Program's Most Community Service Award - Junior at Bentworth High School. She attended Pitt's summer softball camp with the money she won from the award.

Marshalek plans to attend college next year, where she will major in biology or animal sciences with a minor in criminal justice. She also plans to continue playing softball.
Her goal is to become a veterinarian.

This article is part of a human interest series that will feature past recipients of The Challenge Program's four award categories: Most Improved, Best G.P.A., Most Community Service and Best Attendance. The Challenge Program is a nonprofit organization located in Johnstown that provides financial incentives to students for successes they achieve while still in high school. The Challenge Program also aims to provide a bridge between high-school students and the local business community.