

ZACK BRINT – Elm Place Middle School, BURT CHAIKIN – Northwood Middle School, JAMES LIEBENSON – Edgewood Middle School (Nominated by Mayor Michael Belsky)

These three students, all members of their respective student councils, represent the 3 middle schools of School District 112 and the 6th through 8th grade population of the City of Highland Park.

For the last few years Zack, Burt and James have worked to implement comprehensive recycling programs in their schools and the community. They decided they would combine the force of the entire middle school population to be heard and effect change. With the support of their student councils, they formed S.R.E.S, formally known as Students for Responsible Earth Sitting in Highland Park. They believed they could be unstoppable as a combined force.

They worked to implement policies and practices to recycle all waste in the 112 schools to help protect and sustain our planet. To do this, they visited each of the schools to determine district-wide needs, spoke with representatives from the District waster provider, Veolia, reviewed the current Contract, redesigned Recycling Truck Routes, analyzed dumpster and recycling-collection-can needs at each school, met with their school administrations and the superintendent, kept their student councils informed, wrote and produced a film to educate the District's students about the need to recycle, and authored a letter to the Mayor.

Their plan was well thought out and their perseverance unwavering. Their concern to teach and educate their younger friends at the grade schools was always paramount. They have demonstrated problem solving skills, diplomacy and selfless determination. Their efforts have benefited the entire community. And their self reward was to see recycling dumpsters delivered to the schools and collection canisters placed in their cafeterias.

Zach, Burt and James have quietly done each one of us a huge favor and we are certain we will continue to hear great things about these talented young men. With honor, we recognize them with Robert Barnard Character Counts Pillar Awards.

TERESA CASTRO, Oak Terrace, 2nd Grade (Nominated by Loren Dixon)

Teresa has been nominated for a number of qualities that exemplifies several of the Pillars of Character. She is an exemplary student always following directions. She shows a strong inner character and does not submit to peer pressure when making decisions. In fact, Teresa who otherwise was quiet and reserved in the beginning of the year, has really come “into her own” during the school year, and in doing so has truly demonstrated the Pillars of Character.

Teresa is generous with her time in and out of the classroom. She helps her peers academically and in non-academic situations, many times without being asked. She is very helpful to other second graders and is the energy and uplifting spirit that students need when the going gets tough. Teresa herself has overcome some personal hurdles, doing so while always living the Pillars of Character. Congratulations, Theresa!

GABRIELLA COOPERMAN – Braeside, 2nd Grade (Nominated by Larry Hiles, Karyn Korel & Sheri Lucterhand)

It is hard to briefly sum up all that Gabriella Cooperman has done at her young age. Two years ago, after seeing a video of the war on television, Gabriella raised over \$500 for Israel by having a lemonade stand. This year, she set up another lemonade stand to benefit The Equestrian Connection, an organization which provides therapeutic riding for children with special needs. She was inspired by seeing the impact these services have had on her younger sister. Gabriella also plans to use her lemonade stand to raise money to provide hats, gloves, and stuffed animals for homeless children in Chicago.

Gabriella has a career modeling on television and donates a portion of her earnings from each job to a charitable organization. She also donates one-third of her allowance each week. Additionally, she has helped make sandwiches for a homeless shelter with her Hebrew school class.

Gabriella's heart is as golden as her smile. She knows that whether she is packing lunches for people at a homeless shelter, selling a cup of lemonade, or donating toys to needy children, the value of giving comes in any form, as long as it is done with love. When Gabriella says "we must do something" when seeing a need, she acts on it. Let us all live by Gabriella's words: "We must do something."

LOREN DIXON – Associate Director of Open Lands (nominated by Sandy Anderson, Principal of Oak Terrace School)

As the Associate Director of the Lake Forest Open Lands Association, Loren Dixon has made a memorable difference for students. She has always thought that children of all economic backgrounds should have the opportunity for an experiential environmental education. Through her job with Open Lands, she has turned this dream into a reality. Finding funding and donors, volunteers, and translators, last summer, Loren put together a day camp experience for children at Oak Terrace School that they will long remember. This fall, she added a program for 20 students at Oak Terrace to extend their experiences into the school year. This spring, another group will benefit from an 8-week environmental program she created. Loren's dedication to both children and the environment is remarkable. She has changed the lives of children forever and is most deserving of a Character Counts Pillar Award.

JESSICA DUKATT – Elm Place School, 6th Grade (nominated by the 6th grade team and Pete Helfers)

Jessica is an excellent student and always comes to school prepared and eager to learn. She responds to academic challenges with integrity and creativity.

Jessica interacts exceptionally well with others and is accepted by all her peers. She rises to the challenge of group leadership and leads with humility, dignity and kindness and has respect for everyone.

The sixth grade teachers at Elm Place nominated Jessica, however, for more than her academic achievements and leadership abilities. She shows incredible empathy for all of those around her. She shows kindness to everyone regardless of their socio-economic status, race or religion. She also goes out of her way to choose partners who might not be chosen by others. To quote the teachers: maybe her parents instill this empathy in her, or maybe she was simply born a sweet young lady. Congratulations, Jessica. You are most deserving of the Character Counts Pillar Award.

SARAH ELBAUM – Lincoln School, 4th grade (Nominated by Ellen Rubenstein and Emily Mc Fadden)

No matter how other students are behaving, Sarah is always doing the right thing. It was a simple decision to nominate Sarah because she exemplifies all six of the pillars of character. Sarah gives up her lunchtime twice a month to serve on the school's Student Leadership Team. On this team she is responsible for helping to generate and implement ideas that will increase student pride. Sarah also gives up her lunch recess twice a month to serve on Service Club, a community/school based club that works with the homeless and those less fortunate.

Sarah has also helped to gather clothes, shoes, toys and other necessities for area homeless shelters. She recently made and delivered thermometers to an elderly person's home.

Sarah puts forth great effort in everything she does from school work to service projects and has personal goals that probably put the rest of us to shame. We are pleased to present this award to you.

SHELLEY FAIRMAN – (Nominated by the staff from the Highland Park Senior Center

Shelly Fairman has provided exceptional service as a volunteer at the Highland Park Senior Center since 2004. Staff describes Shelly as “someone we can count on” and she is often rearranging her personal schedule to best serve the Senior Center. Shelly is a devoted, attentive, and diligent volunteer. Shelly does all that is asked of her, and more. Whether she is tending to the Senior Center members or aiding in the day to day tasks, she is truly a gift.

Shelly began as a reception desk volunteer, until she saw the need for computer tutor volunteers. She took on the task of helping older adults learn the ways of computer technology. She often makes multiple appointments with Highland Park seniors to tutor them. She is patient, kind, and accommodating. She sees that her efforts help to provide Highland Park’s senior population with the best possible services. Her ability to understand the members at the center, while helping them meet their computer goals, is a tremendous help.

In addition to volunteering at the Senior Center, Shelly has volunteered for many years at L.I.N.K.S. in Northfield for over 15 years. Shelly is truly an asset to Highland Park and is well deserving of this award.

EMMA FLEISHER Lincoln School, 4th grade student (Nominated by Larry Patrick teacher at Lincoln School)

Emma can best be described as a well rounded 4th grade student who stands out in her ability to make good choices.

She is a positive role model for others and a leader in community service. Emma is an active member of the school's service club and on the leadership team where she works to help install pride in her school as well as ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for her peers.

Emma is a pleasure to work with and a joy to have in the classroom. As a character counts award winner she will continue to set the tone for those around her. Congratulations, Emma!

THE FOX SISTERS, SARAH, REBECCA AND ANNA - Ravinia School (Mrs. Jeanne Banas, Mrs. Colleen Butler, Mrs. Andrea Dunning, Ms. Carrie Culos, Ms. Sue Orłowski, Mrs. Sandra Abrams)

While some would say it is rare to have a child be nominated as a pillar of character for the community, the Fox family has three!

First, there is Sarah. Sarah desires to work with and become a special education teacher. She shows her character by giving up her time to work with kids in the Educational and Life Skills classroom. She also participates in the Lunch Buddies program, in which she spends her lunch hour with the ELS students. Sarah continues her efforts on the playground, alerting staff when one of the ELS students is in an unsafe environment. Sarah is always respectful and always looks for ways she can help.

Like Sarah, Rebecca shows her character by volunteering in the classroom and by helping fellow students catch up on missed work. Along with her sisters, Rebecca participates in monthly Care Club meetings, where she works on projects and collects various items to give to groups in need. Rebecca continues to show her understanding of the six pillars by giving up time to play with students in the NSSSED program. She is a wonderful role model for them. Not to be in the shadow of her two sisters, Anna volunteers at the Sunrise Assisted Living Home, distributing mail, reading to the residents, helping to clean rooms and cheering up the residents. Anna has generously donated her hair to "Locks of Love" and also participates in her school's Lunch Buddies program. Anna is currently working on a Mitzvah Program, making an assortment of items to give to children in New Orleans and saving money to "Save the Rainforest," a cause dedicated to the stopping of tree cutting, preventing the endangerment of plants and animals and the further rainforest destruction.

At this time, we are most proud to award Robert Barnard Character Counts Pillar Awards to the three Fox Sisters, Sarah, Rebecca, and Anna

JASON FOX –Wayne Thomas School, 4th Grade (Nominated by Beth Siegel and 4th Grade teachers, Susan Silberman and Lauren Polakoff)

Wayne Thomas fourth grader, Jason Fox, embodies the six pillars of Character Counts. He is friendly, outgoing, and has a smile that lights up the room. He comes to school with an upbeat and positive attitude, which filters throughout the building. Jason arrives early to school to help peers with their academic work without being asked. He seems to instinctively know when people need help and seeks no recognition for his generosity. Jason was elected the Vice President of Student Council; an amazing feat for a fourth grader. As Vice President, he is the chairman of the community service committee. This responsibility has allowed him to use his enthusiasm to encourage participation in the Student Council's community projects. He worked tirelessly to collect donations, purchase gifts, and wrap presents for the Phyllis Santullano Fund. He is also a member of the school's recycling committee, welcome committee, and Kids' care group. In addition, Jason is affiliated with the Coho Swim Team, which delivers donations to new immigrants. Wayne Thomas staff and students feel very fortunate to have Jason Fox as part of their school community.

SHEILA GOLDBERG – (Nominated by James Finedore)

Sheila Goldberg signed on to be a substitute teacher, after teaching in District 112 for over thirty years. Sheila can be counted on in a pinch and can be best described by the phrase, "Once a teacher, always a teacher." Sheila has become a super sub to the Red Oak second grade team.

In addition to substituting, she has been volunteering her time for the past two years to tutor students at Red Oak. She helps them with their reading skills to build reading fluency. She has worked with a diverse group of students including those that have just arrived from other countries to learn the English language. She has also voluntarily helped level children for reading at the beginning of the school year start reading so that they would be comfortable with and successful at reading right away. Sheila is also a poet and writer. She shares her love for words with the students that she is working with. Sheila is an excellent example of good character and uses the pillars of good character on a daily basis.

JOANNE GORDON – (Nominated by Sandy Anderson, Principal of Oak Terrace)

Some schools are extraordinary because of the vision, leadership, discipline, and service of staff members. For some schools, it takes volunteer dedication along with staff commitment to become great. Beginning last year, the contributions of Joanne Gordon, parent, volunteer extraordinaire, and PTA president have helped to bring both parents and staff together to achieve the incredible.

Joanne Gordon's time commitment sometimes exceeds 30 hours a week. She has made so many programs a reality at Oak Terrace. They include: Family to Family, where new families are welcomed regularly; Cultural Celebration events where more than 600 students, parents and staff members learn and enjoy different aspects of culture; Public Relations events to ensure the accurate publicity; and teacher appreciation efforts so that staff who consistently go above and beyond are appreciated.

Joanne has a brilliant ability to focus, develop, and implement change. She is an exceptional communicator who brings together all people for the benefit of children. Joanne has made a great difference in the Oak Terrace School community, and deserves to be recognized as a Robert Barnard Character Counts Award winner.

EMILY HALPERN –Northwood Junior High, 8th Grade (Nominated by Barbara Phillips and the 8th Grade Team)

Emily Halpern is an outstanding young lady. Her qualities are not something that she has achieved and developed in a short period of time; rather, she has consistently demonstrated the traits of a person of character throughout her entire time at Northwood Junior High.

Emily has very good friends with whom she maintains excellent relationships, but she does not let her friends determine her choices. Emily consistently makes smart choices, which are not always the popular choices. Instead, she makes her decisions based on what is the right thing to do.

Emily has a generous spirit. With a smile, she consistently offers to help others and no matter with whom she is paired for a project, she works generously and well. Emily does not seek the spotlight, yet it comes to her because she deserves to be recognized for her kindness. Emily is an active member of the school community. Outside of school she is an accomplished dancer, and within the school she is a member of the spirit squad. She supports the current recycling and community service efforts instituted by the Student Council this year, and is vocal in encouraging classmates to be supportive as well. Emily is an outstanding member of the 8th grade class of Northwood Junior High and very deserving of the Character Counts Pillar Award.

GABRIELLA HELLER – (Nominated by: Traci Jacobsen)

In her freshman year at Highland Park High School last year, Gabriella served as a peer helper in a program for students with developmental disabilities and participated in the Council for Exceptional Children Club. After losing a friend to brain cancer, Gabi established a fund raiser to help other kids afflicted with brain tumors at Children’s Memorial Hospital. Because her friend loved cats, Gabi convinced the Ty Corporation to donate 250 “Cat” beanie babies which she sold for a minimum donation of \$5.00 each. They included a heart shaped tag around the neck with a photo and story about her friend. Gabi was able to raise \$3,800 to be used towards brain tumor research, and plans to continue this effort.

Gabi made a tough choice this school year. She was torn between staying with her friends and teachers at Highland Park High School or accepting a spot at the Illinois Math and Science Academy. Gabi ultimately chose the IMSA and plans on doing research in the field of Autism while at IMSA towards her goal of becoming a neurologist. Gabi is a wonderful model of character and we are most pleased to recognize her as such this evening.

JUDY HUTTON (Nominated by the staff from the Highland Park Senior Center)

Judy Hutton has been a volunteer at the Senior Center for over two years, and in 2007 alone she volunteered over 150 hours. Judy is constantly showcasing her ability to adapt to whatever role the Senior Center needs. She is a kind, hardworking, and conscientious volunteer. Whether Judy is volunteering at the reception desk, computer tutoring, teaching a driving course or as a Senior Health Insurance volunteer, her efforts have never gone unnoticed.

As a Senior Health Insurance volunteer, Judy attends trainings and seminars with representatives from the state of Illinois yearly. She is constantly familiarizing herself with the ever changing aspects of what options the state provides for seniors. Judy's service as a Senior Health Insurance volunteer is vital, as there is a lot of training involved and most members don't have the time to give to this program. She sees that her role as a SHIP volunteer provides so much assistance to residents that she is always looking for ways to improve the program.

Judy also volunteers her time helping at the Senior Center reception desk and teaching a driver's safety course to Highland Park seniors. She is always willing to volunteer in whatever capacity needed. She exemplifies true character....congratulations on your award.

IVY KLEE – Red Oak School, 5th Grade (Nominated by Pamela Kramer)

Ivy makes responsible choices on a daily basis. She works hard in every academic subject and always strives to do her best. Ivy always tries to help those around her who need it, whether or not they are close friends.

Ivy also has a strong sense of community service. In 5th grade, she had many opportunities to learn about the ways she could help, and she enthusiastically joined in. Her service areas included helping the environment, the homeless, and homeless animals. Among other things, Ivy wrote a letter to the local Starbucks asking why they did not recycle their paper and plastic waste, and offered her help in starting up a program to reduce the waste from the store. Ivy and her family donate food to the local food pantry and bring blankets to the local animal shelter. Ivy also bakes goodies for the staff and takes time to play with the cats.

Ivy has compassion for those less fortunate than she, and she acts on that compassion. When it was her birthday, Ivy chose to ask for food donations as a birthday present instead of gifts. She took the food and food gift cards to the food pantry. Because her birthday is near the holidays, Ivy chose to have a party for her classmates. She did not say that it is a birthday party, simply a holiday celebration.

Ivy Klee certainly deserves the Robert Barnard Character Counts Pillar Award for all that she does and for all that she will continue to do.

NATHAN KORN – Red Oak School, 3rd Grade (Nominated by Valerie LaRiviere & Michelle Graff)

Nathan Korn is an exceptionally responsible student, who goes out of his way to advocate for his peers. He has the special talent of making everyone in his class feel important. One morning, his peer was having difficulty expressing and communicating information. Nathan put his hand on her shoulder to console her. Shortly after, a note arrived to the classroom stating what the child was trying to communicate earlier. It was through Nathan's powerful words about the other student that his classmates were able to learn a valuable lesson about communication.

Nathan's class took part in a IDRF Fundraiser to support a family member of one of his classmates. During a play date with this classmate, Nathan was driven by a desire to help and walked with his peer around the neighborhood collecting coins to contribute to the cause. Months later he continued to show his support and commented on other activities his class could do to help the community. Nathan also proposed to create a welcome banner for new students joining the school so they would feel welcome. Nathans' contributions are outstanding and astounding considering he is merely eight years old.

SAMANTHA KRAFT - Indian Trail School, (Nominated by Amie Krummick and the STEP Team)

Samantha is a student who can teach all of us about grace and leadership. She is a peer buddy to a younger student on the autism spectrum with whom she meets weekly. She shows patience and diligence with her buddy and is always supportive. Even when her buddy demonstrates frustration and confusion, Samantha perseveres in trying the strategies she has been given to help calm him down and feel safe. She never gives up. Her calm demeanor and persistence are reflective of her leadership ability amongst her peers in this setting.

Samantha wants to continue to educate and communicate to others how everyone learns differently and how this makes people unique and amazing individuals. Samantha is a wonderful young lady and well deserving of this pillar award.

Congratulations!

DAN & MARGO LACOSSE – (Nominated by Cynthia Plouche, Mike Rodes, and Steve Libowsky)

Visit any athletic field in our community during the fall and spring and you will see hundreds of kids wearing American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) uniforms. These young athletes are participating in a program that guarantees a safe, fair, and fun environment to all who want to play. Highland Park AYSO is an all volunteer organization and is run entirely by unpaid volunteers who serve as coaches, referees, and administrators. Hundreds of volunteers graciously devote their valuable time to the program.

Prior to 1992, Highland Park kids who wanted to play AYSO soccer had to register and play in another community. Dan LaCosse, a longtime soccer aficionado and teacher at Braeside School, and his wife, Margo LaCosse, organized a successful effort to obtain a charter from the AYSO national organization. Dan LaCosse became the first Regional Commissioner of Region 891 and began the dauntless task of literally building, from the ground up, an all volunteer grass roots soccer program in our community. Dan has also served as the Region's equipment manager, a coach and referee, a trainer of new coaches and referees, an administrator, and the overall troubleshooter and conscience of the program. Margo has served as registrar and treasurer, and even allowed the AYSO "hotline" to be installed in her home and be the initial contact with the community for information about the program.

Dan and Margo have continued their efforts even though their children, now all adults, grew out of the program long ago. A program of this size cannot survive without the dedication of a great many volunteers, and there are many. But Dan and Margo are the glue holding Highland Park AYSO together. These two individuals have devoted their lives in service to our community by donating countless hours of time in volunteer service. They provide outstanding examples of Character Counts Pillar Award recipients.

RAIZEL LIEBERMAN - Sherwood School, Fifth Grade (Nominated by Glenn Fortson and the 5th Grade Team)

Raizel Lieberman has been nominated for the Robert Barnard Character Counts Award for her steadfastness in living the Pillars of Character. She always speaks for responsible choices and her dedication to others is apparent through her generosity in donating time to many worthy causes.

Raizel has participated in Sherwood's service club, Helping Hands, written letters to soldiers in Iraq, collected donations for the food pantry, supported recycling in the school and participated in the school walk-a-thon.

In her "spare time" Raizel has also volunteered at the JCC, worked with 3 and 4 year olds in a T-ball program and made fleece blankets to auction for a family support fund. The fifth grade teachers say, "Thank you, Raizel for your hard work. You are an inspiration." We salute Raizel for her hard work and her dedication to the Pillars of Character.

DANA MARESCO – (Nominated by the staff from the Highland Park Senior Center)

Dana Maresco has been a volunteer at the Highland Park Senior Center, recently increasing her volunteer hours. She has spent over 100 hours volunteering in various capacities to ensure that the Highland Park Senior Center has the capability to serve its members.

Dana is reliable, tolerant, and hard working. Whether Dana is serving soup to the Highland Park Senior Center's members or making name tags for a program, she takes on whatever tasks are needed and always does it with pride and diligence. She is compassionate and empathetic, all the while making new members feel welcome and old members feel like friends.

Dana is always willing to adjust her schedule to meet the needs of the Senior Center. Dana is a true gift and staff at the Senior Center feels lucky to have her. She volunteers because she feels that her efforts at the Senior Center aid in keeping the facility running seamlessly. She doesn't volunteer for recognition or glamour; she volunteers because she sees the difference that she makes each and every minute she is there. Dana embodies all of the pillars of good character. Congratulations on this award!

ANA MORALES - Indian Trail School, 4th Grade (Nominated by Laura Golden, Teacher at Indian Trail)

Ana is a young lady who came to Indian Trail School only last year with limited English language skills. In one year Ana has not only learned English, she has also taken on the role of helping those who come behind her. Without asking, she has taken two new students under her wing and has sacrificed her own independence to make sure they have what they need. She makes sure they get to the appropriate classes, receives their lunches, and translates for them when necessary. She does this on her own and without complaint while maintaining her own standard of learning.

Anna can best be described as the quiet mentor and leader. Since character is what a person does when no one is looking, Anna certainly is deserving of this character counts award.

Congratulations, Anna.

NICK MOROF – Elm Place Middle School, 7th Grade (Nominated by Monica Schroeder & the Elm Place 7th Grade Team)

At Elm Place Middle School, some people are popular because of the clothes they wear or actions they take. Nick Morof notices people who are not having fun and feel out of place. He goes out of his way to make them feel included.

Nick has a strong sense of community which includes his school, synagogue, his community, and the world outside world of Highland Park. For his Bar Mitzvah, he donated part of his cash gifts to the Ark, a not-for-profit organization providing services for the needy. In school, he regularly colored paper dolls for the school's Darfur project. He donates toys to various drives for underprivileged children.

Nick has overcome some unique difficulties. His family moved to Highland Park from California when Nick was in fourth grade and he soon noticed the difference in his surroundings. While he is well liked by both the students and staff, he is aware of his need to activate his attempts to fit in. While he has the impression that there are many cliques here, partially since relationships go back to pre-school for some, he works to connect based on who he is today.

Nick loves music. He plays the guitar nightly, and also plays the trombone for school. Athletics are important to him, but so is sportsmanship. Nick hopes that others see him as a person who is caring, likes getting his work done on time and putting forth his best efforts. The 7th grade team at Elm Place certainly does and for this we honor him with a Character Counts Pillar Award.

CHARLOTTE NAWOR & GRACE RHOADES – (Nominated by Mary Beth Nawor)

Last summer, Charlotte and Grace were walking along the Ravine Street beach when they found a dead gull entangled in a fishing line and hook. Ten yards later, they found a second. Both girls were struck by a person's carelessness led to the birds' deaths. Instead of feeling defeated by this event, both girls were inspired to want to make a difference. Together they became the Envirogirls, with the motto "Cool Girls for a Cool Planet."

One of their first actions was to help clean up beaches by picking up trash and debris. They participated in the Great Lake Alliance Adopt-A-Beach cleanup day, as well.

Throughout the fall, they woke up early on Saturday mornings to participate in volunteer workdays offered by - the park district, the county Forest Preserve, and Lake Forest and Lake Bluff Openlands Association. They collected seeds, removed brush and cut buckthorn to help with prairie restoration work.

Another project the girls undertook was to support sustainability by selling reusable grocery bags. The girls designed a logo and had bags printed. They sold nearly 300 bags, educated people with fact sheets, and donated the profits to the Wildlife Discovery Center in Lake Forest to support the care of a blind screech owl.

Charlotte and Grace are passionate girls who believe they can change the world and are willing to work hard to do it. Congratulations, Charlotte and Grace!

LAUREN NESHER – Braeside School, 3rd Grade (Nominated by Larry Hiles, Karyn Korel, & Sheri Lucterhand)

Lauren is only nine years old and already has already had quite a record of providing help to others around the world. Lauren's commitment to helping others started when she was very young. She sold candy to help Israeli children who were victims of suicide bombings.

Three years ago, After Hurricane Katrina, Lauren and other Braeside students organized a drive to provide stuffed animals to children impacted by the hurricane and flooding. They collected the stuffed animals, sorted them, and prepared them for shipping to New Orleans. Lauren even convinced her uncle to provide the shipping, free of charge, to get the toys to Louisiana.

As a first grader, she initiated a drive to send valentines to soldiers in Iraq, resulting in more than 600 valentines and candy hearts being sent to soldiers.

In second grade, Lauren coordinated an effort to assist children in South Africa and Nigeria. She learned about the plight of these children when she attended an Aid Africa's Children fundraiser. She and her classmates sold necklaces, bracelets and key chains which raised over \$600.

Lauren is currently working on a project that assists soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. She is sensitive to the issues these soldiers face as her father and her uncle were both soldiers in a war.

We anxiously await the projects that this creative young lady will think of in the future to assist others who are in need of help. Our community is truly very fortunate to have a young person as committed as Lauren Neshier.

DANIEL OCAMPO – Northwood Junior High, 7th Grade (Nominated by Robin Ruken)

Daniel is a lovely young man whose strong character stands out in a crowd. Daniel makes responsible choices. His assignments always come in on time, and he takes great pride in his work. Daniel's independence, responsibility, pride and quiet self-confidence allow him to step away when negative temptations are presented. He is a quiet, composed leader filled with humility, leading by example.

Daniel's generosity of spirit is evidenced by his willingness to help others in times of need as well as on a daily basis. Daniel is bilingual and offers his translation skills regularly. He is often the first to volunteer to help out in whatever way he can, be it lending supplies to a fellow student, or offering to help a teacher accomplish a task. Daniel's willingness to jump in with both feet makes him a standout!

Daniel's community service includes helping with food drives, making care packages for the troops overseas, and buying holiday presents for community members. Daniel is often the first to come in with contributions, and has been known to come in a donation a second time. Daniel's desire to go above and beyond is inspiring. He is the ultimate team player, and the students and staff know it. Perhaps Daniel's finest quality is his humility. He has a calm, pleasant demeanor, appealing to kids and adults alike. Daniel Ocampo is a true class act!

BARBARA PAGET – (nominated by Terri Olian, City Council Member)

Barbara Paget is passionate about helping other people. She is the founder of the Arthur G. Michel M.D. Research & Education Fund, has raised funds to establish a Center for Breast Health at Highland Park Hospital, and has chaired numerous educational lectures to benefit cancer patients, their families, and medical professionals. Her most remarkable work, however, stems from a special “spa evening” for cancer survivors she started five years ago. To honor them, Barbara asked the owner of her beauty salon (Femmes) if she would offer the services of her salon, on one evening and free of charge, to cancer survivors. For the next three years Barbara hosted similar “spa evenings,” each of which was better than the last.

This past year, Barbara worked tirelessly to have the Highland Park City Council, governments in neighboring communities, and the Illinois House & Senate pass Resolutions in support of an annual Cancer Survivor Beauty and Support Day. She also obtained the support of numerous national organizations, created packets for salons who wanted to host a cancer survivor event, and responded to countless phone calls and emails from individuals who read about her efforts. On December 4, 2007, over 125 beauty salons and spas in Illinois participated in Cancer Survivor Beauty and Support Day, eight of which were in Highland Park. Salons in other states participated as well. All told, nearly a thousand of women, men, and children received complimentary haircuts, manicures, pedicures, and other beauty services – all thanks to Barbara’s vision and efforts to recognize what cancer survivors face in dealing with their illnesses and their concomitant acts of bravery.

Barbara’s real dream is to have a day set aside, annually and throughout our nation, for cancer survivors to be treated to a beauty service of their choice as a way of being recognized, supported, and honored. Though she is short in stature, Barbara is long on energy, commitment, and determination – and there is thus no doubt her dream will come true. Barbara’s dedication to making a difference in the lives of people in our community and beyond demonstrates that she is a person of wonderful character. We thus honor her with a Robert Barnard Character Counts Pillar Award.

SHARON PALANDRI – (nominated by Patrick Brennan, Deputy City Manager for the City of Highland Park)

It is said that one of the best tests of a person's character is how they conduct themselves when they believe no one is watching them. How Sharon Palandri behaves when she believes no one is watching her shows that she is a person of outstanding character.

Sharon is a crossing guard for North Shore School District 112. Rain or shine, in the heat and sub-zero temperatures, she performs her job with a smile on her face. She was not recommended for an award, however, for her friendly disposition. Rather, the nomination was for her willingness to undertake an activity that many people find distasteful – picking up the trash of others.

She is not paid for collecting refuse, but day in and day out she has been observed collecting trash from the ground and landscaping on Mulberry Place near the Union Pacific viaduct where she works. Loose refuse tends to collect in this tunnel and Sharon decided to do something about it. While picking up garbage is clearly not part of her job responsibilities, during her free time between students, Sharon does something good for the community.

Undoubtedly, Sharon has not considered how she serves as a positive role model for the students or residents who see her actions or how her actions benefit the City of Highland Park. It is her character that has driven her to do the right thing. Through the seemingly simple act of picking up refuse, Sharon has demonstrated her strength of character and makes her worthy of recognition as a Character Counts Pillar Award winner.

MARY JO PAPICH – (Nominated by Bunnie Balbirer, Human Relations Commission Chairperson)

Mary Jo Papich is the Fine & Applied Arts Administrative Chair at Highland Park High School, where she teaches Jazz Lab and supervises a staff of 17.

Since 2007, Mary Jo has Co-Coordinated FOCUS ON THE ARTS at Highland Park High School. FOCUS is a unique 3 day program that exposes students and the community to the visual and performing arts. This program seeks to address its multicultural and multigenerational audience by presenting art forms which educate and entertain people of widely diverse backgrounds.

Mary Jo also serves on the Cultural Arts Commission and Sister Cities Foundation, and assists in planning many cultural performance trips for HPHS students.

Mary Jo's efforts to enhance the fine arts experiences for all HPHS students are tireless and endless. She is perpetually giving of herself and her talents to our community, and for this we recognize her with a Character Counts Pillar Award.

JOVANY PARRA - Oak Terrace School, 5th Grade (Nominated by Erica Johnson, 5th Grade Teacher)

Jovany is a generous, resilient and giving young man. From his first moments in fifth grade, he has shown himself to be responsible, helpful, and sensitive to the needs of others. He goes out of the way to help others, is generous with praise and enthusiasm for the ideas of others, and shows real enjoyment in learning. This year, Jovany has been participating in a choral group, the Midwest Young Artists, and has been proud of his accomplishments.

These qualities alone make Jovany a student of outstanding character. However, he had the opportunity to show great resilience and strength the day before his eleventh birthday when his family's home was destroyed in a fire. One the day after the fire, he handed his teacher his homework folder, one of the few possessions he walked away with, so his homework could be on time.

His teacher stated, "When I think of students who embody the spirit of Character Counts, students who do the right thing, even when nobody is looking, I think of Jovany. I am so proud of the person that he is and the role he play in our classroom and our school." Congratulations, Jovany!

MARY PIKE – (nominated by Holly Siegel and Gwen Kroll from Highland Park High School)

For the past 4 years, Mary Pike has served as the Coordinator of the ESL Resource Room at Highland Park High School. Although her job is to supervise the area and assist students and teachers with computer work, this in no way describes what Mary does for HPHS students and their families.

Part social worker, part nurse, part academic resource person, and 100% eternal mother, Mary demonstrates on a daily basis extraordinary compassion and dedication to all those with whom she comes in contact. A 25 year resident of Highland Park, Mary knows a lot of people in the community either from raising three HPHS graduates, pursuing her own interest (especially in art), or simply because of her charismatic personality.

One of her greatest strengths is linking community members together, usually with the goal of helping students in need. Never shy about expressing her outrage at injustice or speaking for those who not have a voice of their own, Mary brings issues to the forefront that need to be addressed.

Her selfless actions also match her words. In an atmosphere of acceptance, Mary opens her house and her heart to teachers, students, and parents. Mary finds jobs and places for people to live, organizes new experiences, and in countless small ways makes a genuine impact on people's lives every day. As a person who respects everyone, Mary should know how much she is respected and appreciated – and is thus recognized with a Character Counts Pillar Award.

JOHN RACHAL– Wayne Thomas School - 3rd Grade (Nominated by Edna Rachal)

Making Responsible Choices, Generosity and Self-Sacrifice, Community Service, and Overcoming Difficulties were all summed up in a recent act of kindness exhibited by this child. When planning began for his upcoming birthday, John told his parents he did not want a party. He said he already had so much and he thought other less fortunate kids should have things, too.

At his church, items of necessity such as toothbrushes, wash cloths, and underwear were given to poor children in Haiti, and John knew of this effort. He saw pictures of the children and the school they attended, and he wanted to do more than give them the basic necessities. So, instead of bringing him gifts, he asked his guests to bring a cash donation for the children of the Spirit of Truth School in Haiti. John collected \$352.00 to be given to help these children. It is John's wish that this will serve as a gift of hope for the students in Haiti and a realization to the students at Wayne Thomas School of what they can accomplish when they come together.

For his demonstration of outstanding character, we honor John with a Pillar Award this evening.

JOHN L. ROPIEQUET – (Nominated by Broucka Sarnoff)

Growing up, John was an avid Boy Scout, achieving the rank of Eagle Scout. To this day, John believes that scouting is an important way to help develop boys become responsible adults. The impact Scouting had on John influenced him to re-establish Boy Scout Troop 324 Since its re-establishment in 1997, John's troop has had a positive impact on boys and has helped them become responsible young adults.

John has been instrumental in establishing and overseeing several projects to help his troop build character, such as; "Adopt a Highway" on Sheridan Road, Clean Up programs at Rosewood Beach, and Food Collection Programs. John has also assisted in Eagle Scout programs that include removal of invasive plants at Heller Nature Center, tree plantings along the bike path, and building birdhouses for the nature center.

One of the merit badges that Scouts earn is citizen in the community. It is quite appropriate that John is a counselor for this merit badge. The Scout learns what constitutes a good citizen and how to be a contributing member to his community. Through his actions, John demonstrates what a good citizen is, and what constitutes good character. He shows through his actions how a person can be of service to the community.

John has recently been awarded the Silver Beaver Award for distinguished service to youth and the President's Award for fundraising to support community activities for the youth. Through his actions, John demonstrates to our youth what constitutes good character and what a good citizen is. For this, we recognize John with a Character Counts Pillar Award.

SOPHIE ROSKIN – Edgewood Middle School, 8th Grade (Nominated by Nick Novak, Kathleen McGrath, & Jane Siedband)

Sophie has a delightful personality and exceptional character. She always does the right thing regardless of what others think or say. She is honest in and out of the classroom and can always be trusted. She is respected by both her peers and staff at Edgewood Middle School.

Sophie is the first to offer comfort and support a fellow student. She has excellent organization skills and teaches her techniques to those around her. Sophie is part of Edgewood's Amazing Amigos; a program that assists students with severe disabilities. She willingly aligns herself with troubled and unpopular peers if she thinks she can help and speaks out about injustices. She is an advocate for the underdog, no matter what the odds.

Sophie also supports the community apart from school. She has cut her hair twice for Locks of Love and helped collect blankets for Orphans of the Storm. She has sung for senior citizens and volunteers to spend time with them at a housing facility. She gave her Bat Mitzvah money to two Jewish social services agencies.

Sophie is determined to succeed and exceed all the limitations placed upon her. Sophie is an inspiration to all of us.

Congratulations, Sophie, on your nomination for a Character Counts Pillar award!

DONALD RUBIN – (Nominated by Maureen Hager, North Shore School District 112 Superintendent)

Don Rubin approaches all that he does with a sense of humor and a sense of purpose. He quietly, and behind the scenes, serves the community in a number of ways that are rarely highlighted, but consistently supportive. Don has a knack for breaking down complex issues into their core and proceeds with confidence and resolve to facilitate their resolution.

In the early 1990s, when the school districts of the community consolidated into one, Don was a supporter and guide on the side. When decisions needed to be made about how to address more recent school enrollment growth, he stood ready as a community SchoolTalk 112 co-facilitator of an extensive community engagement process hosted by North Shore School District 112. Additionally, he offered consultation and advice to the district regarding the fair determination of property assessment of newly privatized housing at Fort Sheridan.

At all times, Don represents the best of our community and encourages all community members to respond in a manner that would showcase the community as a welcoming environment that deals fairly with all citizens. Don is invested in doing the right thing for children in the community and consistently demonstrates integrity and courage in all that he does on behalf of the community. We are fortunate to have those in our community who work quietly and humbly on behalf of our children and our citizens. Don Rubin is such a quiet and humble worker. Thank you, Don, for all your do and congratulations on this award!

PETER SALABAN – (nominated by Sandy Anderson, Principal of Oak Terrace)

Peter Salaban has a long history of dedication to children and schools. He is a retired, passionate, and caring science educator who taught for more than 30 years in School District 62. For the last 10 years of his career, he donated his entire salary for the benefit of needy children.

Last year, at Oak Terrace School, he volunteered approximately 20 hours of his time to the school each week. He was one of the facilitators in the Robotics Club, bought Robotics Kits for the school, and became affectionately known as “Mr. Wizard” or “Albert Einstein” by staff and students alike. This year, Peter is co-teaching science in 4th grade classes two days a week.

Teachers as well as students learn from him. Whether it's building circuits or conducting energy experiments, Peter has inspired teachers to use science as means to engage children and to excel in the scientific method. He has also inspired the students, all of whom love their exciting science lessons this year!

For impacting the learning at Oak Terrace, by generously giving this learning community so much of his time, and for sharing his expertise and kindness, Peter Salaban well deserves the recognition of a 2008 Character Counts Pillar Award winner.

CARLY SCHWARTZ – (Nominated by Mary Jo Papich and Luis Vazquez)

Carly is a senior at Highland Park High School. Carly has served as the student representative for the Sister Cities Foundation for the past two years, after being selected among a group of other highly qualified students. Speaking fluent Spanish, Carly had a positive impact of visiting youth from our sister City of Puerto Vallarta by entertaining them and showing them the sights in Highland Park.

Carly also served as the student coordinator for the Focus on the Arts in 2007 in which five artists were brought to Highland Park by the Sister Cities. Carly was recognized by the artists for keeping everything running smoothly.

Carly has been recognized in the Pioneer Press for a visit she made with Sister Cities to Puerto Vallarta. Carly spent 1 ½ months in Mexico, but not for a luxurious vacation. Carly spent her time at a local shelter taking care of children ages 4 to 12. Carly often spent her own money to take the kids on trips to the movies, Burger King and the arcade. Carly was even referred to by one of the local mothers as “A gift from God”. For her caring nature and generous acts, we recognize Carly tonight as a recipient of a Robert Bernard Character Counts Pillar Award!

BARBARA SEREDA – (Nominated by Alison Gordon, Indian Trail Principal and Maureen Hager, Superintendent)

Barbara Sereda's leadership and focus is other-centered and she uses her talents and abilities to enhance the life experience of others. She is consistently reliable when it comes to identifying ways that her expertise can address the needs of the community.

Over time, Barbara has used her legal training to advocate for children who are family members through adoption. As a natural extension of this work, Barbara teaches the sensitivity and understanding that helps us all understand the adoption process and the potential needs of this population.

Her focus on children resulted in a natural connection to the recently completed SchoolTalk 112 community input process that resulted in a recommendation regarding the assignment of newly arriving families and students to the community. Barbara skillfully helped design and implement this process to elicit community feedback in a respectful and productive manner.

Barbara currently serves as a co-president of the District 112 PTO/PTA Presidents Council. In this capacity, she works on issues of equity, wellness and ecology. Her calm, focused demeanor is an asset in every setting. Barbara Sereda's consistent approach is indicative of the pillars of character and makes her an ideal recipient of a Character Counts! Award. Her ability to approach even the most difficult of issues with an eye toward caring, respect and fairness is an inspiration.

Ours is a better community because of Barbara Sereda and what we can each learn from her approach to life and the challenges that naturally befall us in positions of leadership and advocacy.

JAMI SHARFMAN – (Nominated by Ellen Goldsher)

For the past six years Jami has served on the Board of the Braeside School PTO and on numerous PTO committees. She has served as Ways & Means Vice-President, in charge of all fundraising for the PTO. She has run the annual school carnival and the bi-annual school fund raising auction. Jami has also served as an Administrative Vice-President, in charge of all PTO committees. And, for the past two years she has served as one of the PTO Presidents.

Jami is also a member of the City of Highland Park's Housing Commission. As a Housing Commissioner, Jami attends meetings and reviews plans submitted by developers to insure that the affordable housing goals of the City are being met.

For several years, Jami served on the Board of the North Shore Auxiliary of the Jewish Family and Community Service. This organization raises funds for programs which help children and families in need, including programs for special needs children.

Jami is passing her commitment to community public service to her children. It is through their mother's excellent example that they are already building a tradition of service to Highland Park.

Jami was raised in our community and has chosen to raise her family here. She has shown a commitment to our public schools and to those in need in our community and beyond. Jami is generous to others and gives abundantly of her personal time and efforts. She is the type of person who can be counted on to do any task needed, no matter how big or how small. For all these traits, we honor her with a Character Counts Pillar Award.

DEAN SHEFTEL - Sherwood School, 5th Grade (Nominated by Glenn Fortson)

Dean has been inspired by his parents who have given back to the world for as long as he can remember. Dean has been nominated for this award not only for his dedication to local causes, but for his dedication to carrying the Pillars of Character beyond our local community.

Dean is particularly sensitive to the hardships of refugees from other countries and has traveled to India twice to visit local refugees. Whether abroad or at home, Dean is a great American representative, showing respect and true love for the refugees he has met over the years.

Dean also collects funds for numerous organizations, frequently volunteers at homeless shelters and senior citizen centers, and is also a member of Sherwood's Service Club. It is clear why the fifth grade teachers think of Dean when they hear the words, "Character Counts". Dean truly is an ambassador of "Character Counts".

ALYSSA SMOLENSKY – Wayne Thomas School, 4th Grade (Nominated by Lauren Polakoff)

Wayne Thomas fourth grader, Alyssa Smolensky, is a bright, kind, and helpful student. Alyssa has a wonderful sense of humor and comes to school each day with a smile on her face. She has a natural enthusiasm for learning, and is always willing to assist teachers and classmates without being asked. Her positive attitude and patience help others to feel comfortable and confident in her presence.

Alyssa has formed a charitable club with her friends to collect donations to protect endangered species. Her compassionate drive has spirited many of her peers to join her cause, and she has helped others become aware of issues affecting our planet. To date, they have raised funds to adopt three different animal species across the world.

Alyssa's sweet nature and concern for others makes her an excellent representative of the Pillars of Character.

GINGER STOKES – Olshefke (Nominated by Steven Mueller, H.P. Police Dept.)

Ginger has been a police officer with the Highland Park Police Department for eleven years. She is currently a detective in the Investigations Unit and serves as the department's primary youth officer, a position she has held for the past eight years.

Ginger's service to the youth and families of our community extend far beyond her job description. Ginger has helped hundreds of families in several aspects ranging from teaching better decision making skills, to parenting issues, to being a victim's advocate. Ginger established the department's Peer Jury program which serves as an early intervention program for youth offenders. She has initiated the annual Domestic Violence Awareness Month where the police department and the community collaborate to collect donated items for a battered women's shelter. She has also implemented the Junior Police Academy, a program in which our youth get to interact with the officers and learn about all aspects of law enforcement.

Ginger's actions have made a positive impact on numerous citizens in our community, both young and old. Ginger always makes herself available, both on and off duty, to the young community she has contact with, and many troubled youths often reach out to Ginger in times of need before they make a bad decision. Ginger's dedication to her job and our community and her genuine caring and giving to others demonstrate true character.

PENNY URBON – (Nominated by Sandy Anderson, Principal of Oak Terrace School)

Penny is a long time volunteer at Oak Terrace School. She has volunteered daily for the past four years primarily working with English language learners in the first through third grades. With a background in special education, Penny has helped teachers differentiate assignments and scaffolds the learning for students so they grow quickly. Penny purchases books for children so that they can practice reading skills at home.

Penny has also authored and introduced a math computation program at Oak Terrace. Now used in several states, Penny donated this program to Oak Terrace and conducted staff workshops in this regard so that even struggling students at Oak Terrace know their math facts early on.

There is no way to repay Penny for all that she has done for Oak Terrace. This award will recognize her for the service she provides for the community. Congratulations, Penny!

BRIAN VASQUEZ - Oak Terrace School, 3rd Grade (Nominated by Nicole Nozicka)

Brian is someone who exemplifies character by making responsible choices in both his academic and personal life. He does this by getting involved as a peer mediator for his friends in and out of the classroom.

He is hard working and gives his full attention to as many tasks as he is given. Brian's appreciation of the value of a good education is exceptional for a nine year old. While he is still learning English, his personal desire to succeed gives him the courage to ask many questions to make sure that he fully comprehends the tasks at hand.

He is always willing to help others and to give of himself, while encouraging others to follow the rules and to make good choices. Whether he is helping out a friend with homework, making a peanut butter sandwich for his principal, or cleaning up the cafeteria, Brian is a Pillar of Character.

LEAH WITTENBERG - Edgewood Middle School, 8th Grade (Nominated by Carly Leavitt & Mollie McDougall)

Leah takes pride in her community, education and family. She is a good decision maker and is not afraid to be independent. She demonstrates her personal integrity at all times and rises about the social pressures of the group.

Leah goes out of her way to help everyone. In orchestra, she helps others with their music and materials. She is also supportive of their efforts and is willing to take on challenges such as auditioning for IMEA and participating in solo and ensemble. She baby sits for her brother and helps her mother grade papers for students. Leah approaches everything with a smile, enthusiasm and great attentiveness.

Leah has shown a commitment to community service. Throughout the year she has been a leader in the 8th grade service-learning project on refugees. They have been in contact with a group of refugees living in Chicago creating hand-made toys, and providing books and games for underprivileged refugee children and adults. In Highland Park she has taken an active role in school projects such as Moraine Township Food Drive, donating to Planned Parenthood, and 100th Day of School Celebration for which they organized a fundraiser to purchase books and supplies for children in a disadvantaged Chicago city school.

Leah has great inner strength. She has worked extra hard to overcome difficult personal and social experiences. For all that Leah has accomplished and for her clear demonstration of good character, we honor her with Character Counts Pillar Award.