

STAFF REPORT

DATE: February 20, 2018
TO: City Council
FROM: Carrie Dyer, Community Engagement & Cultural Services
SUBJECT: 2018 Golden Heart Awards

Recommendation

Present awards to recipients of the 2018 Golden Heart Awards.

Fiscal Impact

Costs including staff time, materials and items for the reception are included in the 2017-2018 budget.

Background and Analysis

In memory of the death of Andrew Mockus, who was tragically killed by his peers in 1992, the City of Davis Recreation and Park Commission expanded its commitment to the youth of the Davis community. Public forums were held to discuss various issues and to brainstorm on how the community could do more to meet the needs of the teens in Davis. One of the outcomes of the forums was to create an annual award recognizing outstanding youth in the community.

Nominations for the award were accepted November 2017 through January 19, 2018.

The selection committee spent considerable time reviewing the nominations and were impressed by the nominations. The committee consisted of:

- Stephanie Koop, Recreation and Park Commissioner
- Kate Snow, Davis Joint Unified School District Climate Coordinator
- Robert Larson, City of Davis Community Services Coordinator

After lengthy consideration, it is recommended that the following recipients be awarded the Golden Heart Award for 2018.

Community Service – Sithmi Jayasundara:

Team Davis is our local Special Olympics team, serving approximately 170 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities from Yolo County.

Sithmi Jayasundara has served as a committed volunteer for Team Davis since 2014, beginning as an assistant basketball coach when she was a student at Holmes Junior High. From day one she had a way of not only serving in a coaching capacity but also befriending participants. Over the past few years, Sithmi has expanded her involvement with Team Davis and now helps with basketball, softball, soccer and track and field. She spends at least one day every week with Team Davis. We count on her as one of our lead volunteers and our coaches depend on her.

Sithmi is always willing to do whatever is asked of her. She knows everyone's name and greets everyone with a smile. Her calm demeanor and ongoing encouragement has a way of addressing the individual needs of our athletes who may get tired, stressed or need to rest.

Sithmi has a special touch with individuals and is an outstanding volunteer.

Community Service – Elijah Smith:

In junior high, Elijah Smith began participating in anti-bullying training. As a student leader he committed to intentionally creating a welcoming environment for every student on campus. Now, as a junior at Davis High School, he serves as President of the Black Student Union. This student club has grown to have up to 50 students of all race and ethnicities. It is a comfortable place for many different types of students to find emotional and social safety, connection, and meaningful dialogue and action about often-contentious issues. His nominator states that part of the club's success is in part to Elijah's steady dedication and leadership. As one of few Black young men (he is biracial) in his classes, Elijah has chosen to risk sharing his experiences as a young Black person in Davis, opening himself up to social interrogation both by his peers and teachers.

In these last few months, the school community has depended on Elijah's leadership in crafting a constructive response to the series of hate incidents, showing up as graffiti at Davis High. He served on a "We All Belong" panel with his peers, again sharing his experiences and those of some of his peers, about the challenges of walking a campus where these hate incidents can happen isolated or in series at any time. He led the Black Student Union in a series of constructive, healing dialogues around these incidents, and is now serving with Kate Snow (DJUSD Climate Coordinator) with a handful of his DHS peers on how best to respond to these events for the good of the entire campus.

Elijah and his leadership are an essential gift to our community.

Personal Challenge – Nora (Nargiz) Abduli:

The summer of Nora's fourteenth year, she lost her father to cancer. Every moment of every day she deals with the gravity of this loss. Despite this, Nora maintains an incredible sense of humor and a strong desire to make others laugh.

"The slogan is 'push for the tush,' you're supposed to wear your underwear over the top of your pants." Her nominator and school counselor states she is used to hearing all kinds of different things, but this statement truly took her back. After laughing, Nora explained that she would like to take part in spreading awareness about colon cancer.

Nora volunteers at the library in Davis, passes all of her classes, juggles after school activities, and assists with her family's small business. Her parents immigrated from the middle east, and Nora honors her heritage and is bilingual.

Nora has never been known to shy away from difficult things. It simply isn't her character. She carries on each day, makes other people smile and gives back to the community.