

Civic Engagement

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INTERNATIONAL
ISSUE

Sept./Oct. 2010

RUTGERS | School of Public Affairs and Administration | spaa.newark.rutgers.edu

Awards

Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey Scout Awarded National Young Women of Distinction Honor

From SHARE

Shannon McNamara, 16, of Basking Ridge, New Jersey, has been named one of the Girl Scouts' 2009 National Young Women of Distinction. The award is given for demonstrating extraordinary leadership in the completion of a community action project. Girl Scouts of the USA honors only ten National Young Women of Distinction each year. Each of the young women has earned her Girl Scout Gold Award – the highest award in Girl Scouting.

Shannon was recognized for her efforts to empower African girls through education. Kathy Cloninger, CEO, Girl Scouts USA, presented Shannon with the award at a special awards ceremony on February 27 at the Girl Scout National Corporate Leadership Meeting in St. Louis.

Each honoree spent one to two years on a community action project that had far-reaching effects in her community and beyond. Among the honorees this year are authors, advocates, and environmentalists with projects based in a wide range of locations – from India, Africa, and China to neighborhoods in Louisiana and California. Shannon was the only honoree from the Northeast.

Shannon's After-school Reading Exchange (SHARE, www.shareinafrica.org), was founded in 2008 out of a desire to empower girls in East Africa to reach their highest potential through reading. Shannon has mobilized 800 New Jersey students to volunteer thousands of hours collecting 21,000 books, which were delivered to impoverished African school children their age.

Shannon has traveled the last two summers to Tanzania to expand the SHARE program to three schools, helping approximately 150 girls improve their reading and English language skills. The non-profit renovates deteriorated classrooms, creates

school libraries, and employs teachers. SHARE's motto is: "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

Shannon's work has earned her numerous awards, media attention, and even recognition by celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and Miley Cyrus. Shannon was also recently named one of New Jersey's top two youth volunteers for 2010 by the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards. This nationwide program honors young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism.

Girl Scouts Heart of New Jersey builds girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place. For information on Girl Scouts or to volunteer visit www.gshnj.org.

