

22 New Jersey State Governor's Jefferson Awards given out at Newark Museum

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NEWARK — It's great to receive an award, but it's even better to be recognized by one's peers.

That's the sentiment Jessica Levy shared before heading to the Newark Museum, where the annual New Jersey State Governor's Jefferson Awards — which honor volunteers — were given out Monday night.

The 17-year-old student at Gloucester County's Washington Township High School represented one of five volunteer groups awarded for their services in the Lead360 Challenge, a youth-based program created through the Jefferson Awards. For the first time in 42 years, both children and adults were honored.

Karen Hatcher, director of youth programming for New Jersey Jefferson, said the organization came to realize that both service awards deserved the same celebration.

"[The Lead360 Challenge awards] are now integrated with the adults because their stories are so inspiring and we want the people of New Jersey to understand that these future leaders of volunteer work are engaged and involved," Hatcher said.

The New Jersey State Governor's Jefferson Awards is administered by the Community Foundation of New Jersey, The Star-Ledger and the Governor's Advisory Council on Volunteerism, with support from corporate underwriters. It is a local program of The Jefferson Awards, a national volunteer recognition program established in 1972 by the American Institute for Public Service.

The Lead360 Challenge, which selects the top nominated youth service projects in the state, honored Kevin Williams for his Wrap 4 A Smile Foundation; Kayla Roque, Karol Pierre, Karina Costa, Eileen Conaty and Marina Santiago for their work with the Benedict Cor Defenders; Danielle Burns for the Cinderella Project at West Milford High School; Jennifer Little for her Strength out of Shadows program, and Levy for her Celebration of Service Gala.

Levy said her gala, a collaborative effort of her high school's Students in Action group, worked to raise community awareness and inspire service projects. It's not a coincidence that the gala is a lot like the Jefferson Awards.

"I went to the awards last year, and it sparked our idea," Levy said. "The gala was multipurpose and I'm really proud of how it went."

Although she is "open-minded" about new opportunities that may come her way, Levy is focused on ensuring that the gala is an annual event that continues to run past her graduation.

"I have so much left in front of me – this was the first big event I have coordinated," Levy said.

In addition to the Lead360 winners, the Jefferson Awards also introduced two new categories Monday. The NJTV Education award was presented to Bruce Reitz, Jr. of Upper Montclair. And William and Ellen Sharkey were presented the inaugural BD Paterson NJ Patriot award for their services to the city of Paterson.

Nineteen other individuals and groups were honored with Jefferson Awards, including: Diane L. Allen, West Orange community volunteer; David Caldarella, founder of Dreaming and Believing Foundation; DCH Auto Group, recipient of the Corporate Leadership award; Augustine C. Devito, director of the Basketball for People with Challenges organization; Eric J. Fuchs-Stengel, founder of nonprofit environmental organization MEVO; Alan Goldsmith, founder of the Jewish Renaissance Family Organization; Kevin Hoagland, fundraiser for Central Jersey Spinal Cord Association; Arlene A. Johnson, former Livingston council member and mayor; Taylor Kane, fundraiser for treatment Adrenoleukodystrophy (ALD); Chad Murphy, chief of the Sea Bright Fire Department.

Additional honorees included: The Pied Pipers, homemade meal service providers; Linda Reichert, director of the Helping Hands Ministry at Sacred Heart Church; Zachary Rice, organizer of the Action for Distraction 5K & Kids Action Marathon; Samantha Rizzuto, founder of the STEM-CAM program; Dino Robusto, executive vice president of the Chubb Corporation and chairman of the board of Junior Achievement of New Jersey; Susan Rose, founder of the Mother's Matter program; Somerset Hills YMCA, recipient of the Building Community award; Petra A. Tepper, volunteer mentor in the Amputee Coalition, and David Wish, founder of the nonprofit Little Kids Rock.