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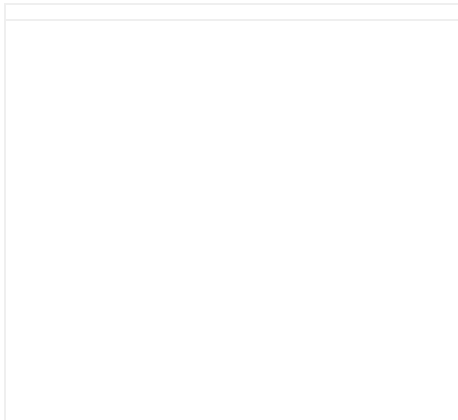
New Jersey's Top Two Youth Volunteers Selected in 16th Annual National Awards Program

Plainsboro and Voorhees students earn \$1,000 awards, engraved medallions and trip to nation's capital Honors also bestowed on youth volunteers in Manasquan, Totowa, Belle Mead, Brigantine, Maplewood, and Edison

Rujul Zaparde, 16, of Plainsboro and Rocco Fiorentino, 14, of Voorhees today were named New Jersey's top two youth volunteers for 2011 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. The awards program, now in its 16th year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

Rujul was nominated by The Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, and Rocco was nominated by Voorhees Middle School in Voorhees Township. As State Honorees, each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion, and an all-expense-paid trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the top two honorees from each of the other states and the District of Columbia for several days of national recognition events. Ten of them will be named America's top youth volunteers for 2011 at that time.

Rujul, a junior at The Lawrenceville School, co-founded a nonprofit organization that has motivated more than 450 students at 23 schools to raise funds that have been used to build over 30 water wells in rural India. Rujul traveled to India with his family in 2007 and visited a village called Paras that didn't have fresh water. "The villagers had to walk a few kilometers each way to reach the nearest water source – and that water wasn't even clean," he explained. "I was astounded. I couldn't even begin to imagine what it would be like to live in such a village." When he returned home, Rujul enlisted the help of a friend to raise \$1,000 to build a well for Paras. They held bake sales at school, set up a car wash, solicited donations door-to-door, and eight months later, had enough money. Rujul went back to India and built the well. "I realized then that we could do even more," he said. "We could build more wells, and help more villagers."



Rujul and his friend started a club at their school to involve other students in their mission, and then founded a nonprofit organization call "Drinking Water for India." They then began to make presentations at other schools about the dire need for fresh water in India. So far, more than 450 students at 23 schools have joined their cause, by forming clubs that fund-raise regularly, or collecting money on their own. As a result nearly three-dozen poor villages in India have new wells. "Clean water is a basic right," said Rujul. "All deserve to have access to it."

Rocco, an eighth-grader at Voorhees Middle School, is a dedicated advocate for children who are blind like him or visually impaired, striving over the past nine years to increase

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government funding for Braille services and educate others about the abilities of people with visual challenges. Sightless since birth, Rocco realized in kindergarten that he could not keep up with his classmates, who could practice reading many hours each week while he received Braille instruction from a state-provided teacher for only one hour. "Frustrated that I could not read as fast as my classmates, I complained to my parents," he said. "I wanted to learn Braille, but the state would not provide the service."

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