



**CONRAD GETS
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Spartanburg's Conrad Earns National Honor for Service to Community

BY LEON G. RUSS
HOMETOWN NEWS

Emily Conrad of Spartanburg recently found out she would be awarded The Prudential Spirit of Community Award for her work in developing "The Need to Read Book Club," a non-profit organization that acts as a multi-chapter reading club encouraging students to read and that also raise money to buy books for at-risk children.

Conrad founded her "Need to Read Book Club" in 2004 after entering middle school and discovering there was no incentive reading program there. She recruited members, organized monthly after-school meetings to discuss good books, and arranged for guest speakers, games, and crafts to add interest.

She also organized a year-end service project in which club members asked sponsors to make a small donation for every 100 pages they read, and earned enough to purchase 400 new books for children at a local soup kitchen.

Conrad's club made such an impact that after two years she began thinking about expanding it. She formed her nonprofit organization, developed a website (www.needtoreadbookclub.org), and then helped establish chapters at Boys & Girls Clubs in Spartanburg and two public schools.



Three more chapters have been added over the past four years and they have distributed more than \$13,000 worth of books to disadvantaged kids.

She said she is "incredibly excited" to win the award and noted it will help her achieve her dream. "My ultimate goal is to make this into a nationwide organization," she said. Conrad may be well on the way as she explained, "We've received interest from states as far away as Oregon."

While she'd like to see it expand to other states as quickly as possible, she put a realistic expectation of two years before having it take root in other states.

Conrad is a home-schooled 11th-grader who will graduate early this year. She has already been accepted into Wofford College and has received a Wofford Old Main Scholarship. She will be a 17-year old freshman this fall.

"One of the reasons I

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chose to go to Wofford," she said, "is that I will remain in Spartanburg for a few extra years, time that will allow me to grow the club. Hopefully by the time I go for a masters degree, the "Need to Read Book Club" will be thriving."

Conrad laughed when she explained what she wants to be when she grows up because she's not certain what she'll major in. "I want to become an opera singer and I plan to get a Masters in voice," she said.

With her eyes on that goal she currently travels to Columbia every Friday for two-hour voice lessons with Dr. Ann Benson and Dr. David Bankston.

She is also a member of the Pine Street YMCA and it was the Y that nominated her for the award.

Conrad said she was encouraged to apply for the award by Greg Tolbert, the President of the Spartanburg Boy's and Girl's Club of Metro Spartanburg. She said Tolbert emailed her a link to the contest and urged her to apply.

Upon learning she had won Conrad said, "It was a wonderful surprise" to be chosen as one of two representatives

school youth - 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 2009 at that time.

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards represents the United States' largest youth recognition program based solely on volunteer service.

This is the 14th year the nationwide program has honored young people for

outstanding acts of volunteerism. Prudential Financial conducts the program in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

For information on all of this year's Prudential Spirit of Community State Honorees and Distinguished Finalists, visit spirit.prudential.com or www.principals.org/prudential.

leon@hometown-news.com