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Teen book club founder gets national honor

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Spartanburg student Emily Conrad says serving others is her "greatest passion." Being recognized for doing something she loves is just icing on the cake.

Conrad, 16, recently was named one of the two top youth volunteers in the state by the Prudential Spir-

it of Community Awards program. Janey Turner, 13, of Easley is the other recipient. The girls will travel to Washington, D.C., in May, where 10 youths from across the nation will be named America's top youth volunteers for 2009.

Conrad was nominated for the award by the Pine Street YMCA for her efforts to raise literacy awareness and give back to the

community. She founded her non-profit organization, the Need to Read Book Club, in middle school and has been instrumental in its growth since. The club, which has several Spartanburg chapters and is being packaged for national distribution, encourages students to read with regular meetings, book

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TIM KIMZEY/FILE

"One of the wonderful things about the Need to Read Book Club is I get to encourage other kids to make a difference in the community," Conrad said. "To be able to see them grow as community leaders, it makes me feel good."

\$1,000 scholarship

As a state youth volunteer of the year, Conrad will receive \$1,000.

She plans to use the funds to take classes at Wofford College, which she will attend next year. She also received an engraved silver medallion presented by Prudential representative Evelyn Young Thursday afternoon at the Spartanburg YMCA.

"If we can get young people involved in community service, that's our future," Young told the

YMCA board during the presentation. "I really and truly believe that your group, the YMCA here, has chosen the winner for the nation."

Conrad said the award helps get the Need to Read Book Club more recognition. She hopes to turn the club into a national organization by the time she graduates from college.

Emily Conrad, 16, of Spartanburg is one of two youth volunteers in South Carolina to receive a Prudential award.

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discussions, guest speakers, crafts and games. Members also raise money to buy books for at-risk children. In four years, the club has distributed more than \$13,000 worth of books to disadvantaged children.