

Local teen earns highest honor in American Heritage Girls Program

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A Trenton Diocese teen has become the first girl in the state of New Jersey to win one faith-based organization's highest honor.

Moira Gellman, a member of the American Heritage Girls, received the program's Stars and Stripes Award during a recent ceremony in St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Yardville. The 18-year-old has been a member of AHG Troop NJ0316, which meets in St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Yardville, since the troop's inception in fall 2012.

"My experience with AHG has been nothing but positive," said Gellman, a member of St. Isidore the Farmer Parish, New Egypt.

The American Heritage Girls, founded in 1995 in Cincinnati, Ohio, is a Christ-centered leadership development program with the mission to "build women of integrity through service to God, family, community and country." Girls ages five to 18 in AHG troops in all 50 states and 15 countries worldwide participate in badge programs, service projects, leadership opportunities and outdoor experiences, all with an emphasis on Christian values and family involvement.

In addition to events such as camping, caroling, fashion shows and mother-daughter teas, the AHG troop of about 40 members perform a myriad of service projects, explained troop coordinator Maria Carney.

"Our service activities include caroling at local nursing homes, making lunch and dinner bags for the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen; collecting supplies for Good Counsel Homes-South Jersey, Riverside, and pew cleaning at the church," Carney said. "Our faith activities have included an annual May procession at Visitation Homes, Yardville; visits to [local] shrines and placing flags and wreaths at the veteran's cemetery."

Gellman, who attends the College of St. Rose in Albany, N.Y., said earning the award required more than 100 hours of planning, leading and implementing with the assistance of a mentor leader.



Moira Gellman smiles after receiving the American Heritage Girls' Stars and Stripes Award during a Nov. 29 ceremony. Courtesy photo

Her project was the construction of a sensory garden at the Katzenbach School for the Deaf, Ewing. She explained, "I enhanced an existing memory path, which was given to the school 15 years prior. I added mulch for the paths, raised beds and planters filled with flowers and herbs, added color and, last but not least, a gong."

"As it was becoming more of a reality, I became more and more excited," the teen admitted. "The Stars and Stripes award has been something I've wanted to achieve since I was a little sixth-grader [in AHG] just starting out."

Not just a place of renewed beauty, the site fulfills a higher purpose for students and visitors alike, Gellman said.

"The garden is supposed to show those with disabilities that there are multiple ways to learn and experience God's goodness," she said.