

L Dimensions of Living

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Put it in writing

Contest encourages students to thank community's emergency responders

By MICHELLE CENTAMORE

The Smithtown Youth Bureau is encouraging young people in the community to say "thank you" to local emergency responders by sponsoring a one-page letter that will be judged by Smithtown School District teachers and Smithtown Youth Advisory board members.

The winners of each grade category (k-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) will receive a special commendation from Smithtown Supervisor Patrick Vecchio and will share their submissions at the Smithtown Youth Bureau's Global Youth Service Day on April 22.

Participants in the letter writing contest are encouraged to keep their message positive and thankful, acknowledging an emergency responder who has had a positive impact in their life or in a message that expresses general gratitude for all emergency responders. Entries must be submitted no later than February 17.

Each letter must include the participant's signature – first name only - and then first and last name, grade, address, phone number and email on a cover sheet or in an email. Letters may be emailed to youthb@tosgov.com or mailed to Smithtown Youth Bureau, 161 East Main Street, Smithtown, New York, 11787. Contest scoring guidelines may be viewed by visiting the Smithtown Youth Bureau website at www.smithtownny.gov/youthbureau.

Now in its fifth year, the town-wide letter writing contest, which theme changes each year, aims to "promote community service and citizenship among young people and to also provide opportunities for families to participate in community service together," said Stacey Sanders, Executive Director of the Youth Bureau. "Children are engaged and feel that they could do something in their communities and with their parents, too. It unites them."

The theme of this year's letter-writing contest was chosen by the Smithtown Youth Advisory Board, comprised of 28 members, 19 high school students and nine adults, each appointed by Town Supervisor Vecchio and the Smithtown Town Board.

"We chose to honor EMS workers, police, and firefighters because we felt they deserved recognition," said Michelle Wolk, a senior at Commack High School and co-chair of the Programs and Projects Committee for the Smithtown Youth Bureau. "Everyday they risk their lives and work so incredibly hard to protect us," she added. "The letter-writing contest offers a unique and person opportunity for young people to recognize and show appreciation for the "selfless nature" of first responders. It teaches the idea of being humble. It helps to put life into perspective by realizing the challenges that these individuals face on a daily basis."

The letter-writing contest has a lasting, positive impact on the community, said Ms. Sanders, and has been a popular and successful activity leading into



Smithtown Youth Bureau
Letter Writing
Contest

*Say "Thank You" to our
Emergency Responders*

POLICE FIREFIGHTER EMS

Please write a one page letter to an Emergency Responder who has made a difference in your life, or expressing appreciation and gratitude to all Emergency Responders.

Keep your message positive and thankful.
Please sign the letter with your first name ONLY.

Entries will be judged by the following categories: grades K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12
See Youth Bureau website for **contest guidelines** at www.smithtownny.gov/youthbureau

Winners will be recognized by the Town of Smithtown at the Smithtown Youth Bureau's Global Youth Service Day on April 22, 2017

Kindly submit entry no later than **February 24, 2017**. Entries **MUST** include **first and last name, grade, address, phone number and your email** on a *cover sheet* or in an *email*.

Email: youthb@tosgov.com
Or mail to:
Smithtown Youth Bureau
161 East Main Street
Smithtown, NY 11787



Global Youth Service Day. It has been embraced in the schools, too, she noted, "because teachers are able to use it in the classroom, focusing on themes of citizenship and community service - plus the fact that it is a writing exercise." As a result, many teachers have incorporated the letter-writing contest into their classwork.

Last year, the Smithtown Youth Bureau received approximately 400 letters, the theme of which was "thanking our military veterans." "The letters were very

touching, especially from the very young ones. It was great to read the letters from the child's point of view, how they thanked the military," Ms. Sanders recalled. "I have a feeling we will see the same kind of sentiment expressed by the young people for their gratitude for the emergency responders," she said.

For additional information, call the Smithtown Youth Bureau at 631-360-7595.