

Colorado author finds young heroes: Springs, Pueblo teens among 10 who win \$2,000 for community projects

By Anslee Willett
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Tom Barron's program, The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, is in its first year. Barron has received thousands of letters from children and adults saying how the heroes in his books inspired them.

Author Tom Barron creates young heroes in his children's books. Now he's looking for real ones.

And he's found 10 of them — including one from Colorado Springs and another in Pueblo West.

"We thought if we were lucky, we'd have one or two kids maybe statewide who would reach the caliber we wanted to recognize," said Barron, 49. "We were just blown away by the quality of kids."

Barron's program, The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, is in its first year. It recognizes Colorado children ages 8 to 18 who have demonstrated courage, tenacity and generosity through community projects in the past year.

The award is \$2,000.

The 10 winners out of 24 entries include an 11-year-old boy who raised money for a baby needing a heart transplant, a 13-year-old boy who raised \$9,000 for a burn victim, and a 16-year-girl who created a group that gives scholarships to girls in Africa.

"Especially in difficult times like today, we need heroes more than ever," Barron, a Black Forest native, said. "We need to remember them and honor them and give them a chance to inspire us to make this world a better place."

The winners will receive their prize money Tuesday in Denver. Winners Tenise, 18, of Colorado Springs and Michaella, 14, of Pueblo West will be recognized Oct. 9 at Penrose Public Library.

"I'm really honored they're flying me home to receive my award," Tenise said from her Arizona State University dorm room. "I'm honored they feel my accomplishments need that kind of recognition."

Tenise, a Sierra High School graduate, won the award for her role as president of Love Is Finding Everyone, or LIFE, a teen service group. The teens gave Christmas packages to more than 250 families, made Easter baskets for hospitalized children, spearheaded an

AIDS awareness and education program, and raised money for a woman who needed jaw surgery.

Tenise said she isn't doing good deeds for awards.

"It's just like you help someone," she said. "People are really sincere when they say thank you, and you know you helped them and changed their life."

Michaella won for being a leader in creating the annual Exceptional Rodeo, which reaches about 35 children with physical disabilities.

"When it comes to a handicapped child, some people just look at the outside of them and say, 'Oh, they're weird' or 'They're different,'" Michaella wrote in her nomination essay. "But look inside to that person's heart, and you'll see they probably have a bigger heart than you do!"

She also created the Foal Adoption Program, which places unwanted horses with 4-H children.

"Children can come out of the darkness with just one special thing you do for them," Michaella wrote. "Just that one thing can change that person's life forever!"

Barron got the idea for the program, named after his mother who lives in Black Forest, from his books. Most have heroes, he said, where "the kid has to reach down inside and find that little extra something, a little extra wisdom or strength. And because of that, the kid makes a huge difference to their world."

Barron, whose pen name is T. A. Barron, has received thousands of letters from children and adults saying how the heroes inspired them.

"It got me to thinking, if imaginary heroes can have that kind of impact, what about real heroes?" Barron said.

He wants the program to create a ripple effect of more youths giving to their communities.

"Every choice we make is like throwing a pebble into the lake," he said. "You never know how many shores you'll touch. These kids who have thrown pebbles have thrown some really big pebbles."

Barbara Ann Richman, the prize program director, added, "It's humbling for me to note how compassionate our young people are. They're already out there making a difference. They're a third of my age and they've done twice what I have."

LIST OF WINNERS

- Mark, 11, New Raymer, organizer of a jump rope skip-a-thon to raise money for a baby needing a heart transplant.
- Julia, 12, Boulder, organizer of the Showers to Go! Program to provide personal-care kits for the homeless.
- Michaella, 14, Pueblo West, creator of Exceptional Rodeos for children with physical disabilities.
- Michael, 13, Denver, organizer of a bowl-a-thon that raised \$9,000 for a burn victim.
- Estephania and Esperanza, 13 and 14, Denver, spearheaded Project Literacy in which middle-school students serve as reading tutors for neighborhood elementary students.
- Adam, 16, Boulder, incorporates breast cancer awareness in magic shows he performs for schoolchildren and teachers.
- Carter, 16, Steamboat Springs, worked with classmates and local government to protect 185 acres along the Yampa River.
- Ashley, 16, Golden, creator of AfricAid, a group dedicated to providing scholarships for girls in Tanzania.
- Tenise, 18, Colorado Springs, president of Love Is Finding Everyone (LIFE).