

CHICAGOLAND EXTRA

VOLUNTEERS JANICE GUZON

Student honored for her vision to help needy

Who: Janice Guzon, 16, of Hoffman Estates, has been named the top high school volunteer in Illinois by the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young volunteers.

What she does: Guzon, a senior at St. Viator High School in Arlington Heights, is founder of EYEsee, an international mission helping to fight poverty by collecting used eyeglasses and distributing them to impoverished people in underdeveloped countries, in partnership with Physicians for Peace, EyeCare WeCare, Canvasback Missions and Caribbean Evangelical Missions.

Last year, Guzon collected more than 7,000 pairs of glasses and hopes to double that this year.

While searching the Internet at school two years ago, she noticed that women in developing countries seldom wore eyeglasses.

Not long after, her father received a letter from his sister in the Philippines who asked for money to buy eyeglasses because it would be difficult for her to work without



Janice Guzon, 16, started EYEsee two years ago. LANE CHRISTIANSEN/TRIBUNE PHOTO

good eyesight.

"I've always taken my eyeglasses for granted, until that point," Guzon said.

Realizing that poor vision is a contributing factor to poverty, Guzon gathered her friends and proposed collecting used eyeglasses for the poor. Her group now has about 50 members.

"This isn't something that really required any money, and we can help fight poverty despite our lack of financial resources," she said.

Guzon and Emily Koulis, 14, of Channahon, the state's middle school honoree, were chosen out of more than 20,000 applicants. Guzon and Koulis each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medalion, and an all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C., in May, where they will join the other 100 honorees. Ten national winners will be announced.

"I am just so excited," Guzon said. "I think it's going to be amazing to meet all those people."

"Miss Guzon clearly had a very impressive volunteer activity to be chosen last year from all the high schools in Illinois," said Scott Peterson, executive director of the Prudential Spirit of Community Initiative.

"As exciting as it will be to go to the nation's capital and all that there is to do there, what they really, really get out of it is meeting all these kids who feel as strongly

about volunteering as they do," Peterson said.

"Our goal is to not only recognize those doing volunteer work and give them encouragement but also make them role models for others," Peterson added.

Guzon is a member of the National Honor Society, National Arts Honor Society and National Spanish Honor Society, and she recently learned that she is one of 253 finalists for the Coca-Cola Scholars Program.

Guzon has volunteered with the American Heart Association and Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, and is on the youth advisory board for the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, affiliated with the Clinton Foundation.

"I want to combine my love for mission work with my love of psychology and love of theology," she said. "I feel like those two things can help me with understanding so much about society and how society functions. I hope to get into global development with that kind of background."

— Phyllis Benson