

10-year-old shows how kids can give back



Photo by Kelly Hill/New Jersey Herald
Abigail Lupi, 10, of Stockholm, was named one of the "Kids of the Year" by Parenting magazine. She is in this month's edition of the magazine. Abigail is the founder of CareGirlz, a performance/entertainment group of girls ages 6-13 who volunteer their time at hospitals and nursing homes. Abigail holds the page open in Parent magazine where the article about her is printed.

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By Robyn Giannini

For The Herald

HARDYSTON — For Abigail Lupi, altruism comes easily.

Ten-year-old Abigail, of Stockholm, is the founder of CareGirlz, a volunteer group of girls ages 6-13 who perform song-and-dance routines at nursing homes, assisted-living centers and children's hospitals.

The girls, who choreograph their own work, showcase their talents with Broadway, pop and Disney selections to the elderly and those struggling with illness away from the comfort of their homes.

Abigail formed CareGirlz three years ago after she performed for her great-grandmother's 100th birthday in an assisted-living home and witnessed the appreciative reaction to her performance from other senior citizen residents in the home.

"I realized that sometimes they get kind of lonely. ... Once they have some people coming to perform for them, they're just so happy, and it makes me happy to see that I'm making others happy," Abigail said.

Parenting magazine recognized the positive work Abigail was doing in her community, and named her one of its eight Kids of the Year. The Kids of the Year contest, also sponsored by Betty Crocker Fruit-Flavored Snacks, encourages innovative and altruistic endeavors by children across the nation.

"We looked for kids who had done something really unique and had not gotten a lot of attention elsewhere," said Stephanie Wood, deputy editor of Parenting magazine. "... We picked a lot of different causes; Abigail's was improving the lives of senior citizens. ... She has got a lot of talent and it's a great thing to share it in a charitable way."

Abigail, who attends The Hudson School in Hoboken, and her CareGirlz colleagues have performed throughout the state, including locally at Knoll Heights Village in Sparta.

Abigail and her mother, Deborah Lupi, who is the artistic and marketing director of CareGirlz, hope to expand their modest organization so they can continue to help others on a grander scale.

Deborah Lupi said she would like to see about 25 girls in the group to ensure each performance would have at least 10 girls, in case a few were unavailable due to scheduling conflicts. The troupe now consists of 13, including Abigail's 6-year-old sister, Madeline, who also is a founding member of the group.

"That's why we're trying to recruit new girls, so that we'll have more for each show; it'll be more fun that way," Abigail said.

"If they're interested in performing and they want to do volunteer work, then we welcome them into our group," said her mother.

CareGirlz also has a subset group called CareAngels, under which the girls donate their time to other charitable work such as garbage cleanup or walkathons to raise money for organizations in need of assistance around the community.

"In the future we hope to do more entertainment at the different walks," Deborah Lupi said.

The next big event for CareGirlz will be the New Jersey Marathon Festival in Long Branch on April 28, where the girls were requested to perform on behalf of the Turner Syndrome Foundation.

"It's really fun to help other people while you're doing something that you really like, because then you get a lot more motivated to do it," Abigail Lupi said.

Abigail and the other seven "Kids of the Year" each received a laptop computer from Betty Crocker Fruit-Flavored Snacks. Betty Crocker also donated one laptop per winner to a child in Africa as part of its "Win and Give" campaign, which seeks to support the ability of kids to make a positive difference.

"We feel that giving back is key not only to successful kids, but successful communities," said Melissa Wildermuth, a representative for Betty Crocker Fruit-Flavored Snacks.

Betty Crocker began its "Win and Give" program after conducting the "Kids' Altruism Indicator," a survey taken in conjunction with the Parenting Group's "MomConnection" research organization. The results indicated that children have a natural instinct for giving back to their communities, and began to have an inclination toward helping others at a young age — younger than perhaps parents were aware of before the study was produced.

"It's a nice wake-up call for us all. ... You don't have to be an adult to make a difference," Wildermuth said.

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