

SIERRA'S STARS

MEET MIRIAM AYERS

The first volunteer job Miriam Ayers can remember is cleaning chalkboards in second grade, when she stayed after school to help the teacher. As it turns out, she's been volunteering ever since.

This Wichita State University freshman is a recent recipient of the Salvation Army's "Volunteer of the Year" award. But she doesn't really think she deserves it.

"The whole experience of being 'volunteer of the year' is surreal," said Ayers. "I don't believe that I did anything out of the ordinary. The only way to improve your community is by giving back."

And she's given back again, and again, and again.

Ayers' first experience with the Salvation Army was after the 1999 Haysville tornado. Since then, she has worked at various charities including the Lord's Diner, her church, and community events. She's even grown her hair out and then cut it all off for Locks of Love, a charity for cancer patients...and not just once, but three times.

She was given the task of organizing volunteer projects for her senior class at Bishop Carroll. Projects included delivering clothes from the school-wide clothing drive to a shelter, filling Easter eggs with candy for a local parish, serving at the Parent Organization annual breakfast, and sorting canned goods from the school canned food drive, just to name a few.

She enjoys helping with the Salvation Army's school supply drive which provides children with much needed school supplies.

"I really like to see the children's faces light up when they see their new box of crayons or bottle of glue," Ayers said. "These kids are so appreciative and their attitudes change dramatically; they look

forward to going back to school eager to learn."

In addition to the school supply drive, Ayers has helped in virtually every part of the Salvation Army including the food pantry, computer work and "housecleaning" duties like cleaning out the canteen.

But her favorite project was helping out at the Salvation Army around Christmas time. "Volunteering puts me in the Christmas spirit," she said. "That's really what Christmas is all about, giving back to your community."

And she knows she really can make a difference. For the past two years, Ayers has given to the Salvation Army's Angel Tree, which provides Christmas presents for the less fortunate. She buys three children presents with money she has earned.

"Because I was able to give those gifts, three children woke up on Christmas day and saw presents under their tree," she said.

Ayers learned the importance of helping other from her mother who spends most of her time volunteering at the Salvation Army. Her mother has also volunteered at Hopenet, a family crisis center and at the Ayers' local parish.

After all the time Ayer's spends volunteering, there's not much time for anything else. She managed to keep a 3.8 grade point average in high school and participated in theater, student council and other student groups. At WSU, she says her favorite subject is math, and she's majoring in Accounting.

When asked if she would like to expand her volunteer efforts, Ayers explained that she will continue to volunteer with organizations like the Salvation Army, but has enough on her plate between school and work.

"There are a lot of great organizations out there doing amazing work who need the help," she said. "I think that I have found a few great organizations to contribute my time to. If in the future I find another organization that is in need of the help, I will probably volunteer there too."

Sierra Scott is a spokesperson, freelance reporter and host of "It's ALL Good with Sierra Scott." To contact Sierra or for more information on her endeavors, visit www.itsallgoodprods.com.



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