Sussex 4-H Member, Emma Rider, selected as Delaware’s top High School Youth Volunteer.

Emma Rider, 14, of Bridgeville was named Delaware’s top High School youth volunteer for 2012 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism.

Emma, a seven year member of the Dublin Hill 4-H Club and a freshman at Sussex Technical High School, has collected nearly 40,000 pairs of used shoes over the past year and a half in order to buy water purification systems in developing countries. While participating in summer mission trips with EDGE OUTREACH, an international organization that helps prevent waterborne diseases through clean water initiatives, Emma learned that a child dies every 15 seconds from drinking impure water. She also learned that by collecting shoes, she could have a direct impact on reducing the death toll.

When Emma first started her project, she set a goal of collecting 4,000 pairs of shoes, which would then be sold to an exporter through EDGE OUTREACH and resold to small businessmen around the world. This would provide enough money to purchase two water purification systems, each capable of purifying more than 10,000 gallons of water per day. The project also creates jobs, gets shoes on people’s feet, and keeps tons of shoes out of landfills. Emma organized shoe drives in schools, churches, and 4-H clubs in three states. Within four months, she had collected 8,500 pairs of shoes. Then she set her sights on collecting a trailer load of shoes – about 22,000 pairs. Emma got a trailer from a shipping company, asked local farmers for pallets and large bins, and to promote her effort, scheduled speaking engagements and sent out information packets. She also recruited volunteers to help pick up and sort donated shoes, as well as organize their own shoe drives. So far, Emma has collected close to 40,000 pairs of shoes, enough to bring life-saving clean water to nearly 20 communities in impoverished lands overseas. She hopes to be able to travel to Kenya or Haiti with EDGE OUTREACH in the next year to help install a water purification system. “It would bring me great joy to see pure water flowing into the cups of children who have never even tasted it before”, she said.

Emma is the daughter of Lori and Dennis Ockels and Rob and Susan Rider.

To learn more about Emma’s project or to find “shoe drive” locations, please contact Lori Ockels at (302) 542-1485.

More information on EDGE OUTREACH can be found at http://www.edgeoutreach.com

Photos by Michele Walfred: Cutline for attached photo:

Photo I. Mary Argo, Sussex 4-H Educator, presents the Prudential Spirit of Community Award to Emma Rider