Delaware Jefferson Awards honors some of the state's best community volunteerism

Community service was honored Monday night in Wilmington at the annual Jefferson Awards. Video provided by John J. Jankowski Jr. 4/30/19 Damian Giletto, The News Journal

With tears in her eyes after winning a Delaware Jefferson Award for public service Monday night, 23-year-old single mother Giovanna Andrews looked out into the crowd at The Queen and thanked her inspiration: her 14-month-old daughter Isabella.

When Andrews was pregnant with Isabella, she walked a mile each week from Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania to a crisis pregnancy center. There, she was taught how to take care of her baby, earning "Mommy Dollars" she could exchange for gently-used and new items for her baby.

It was that experience that led her to found Harper's Heart in August, an organization that hosts giveaways for expectant and new mothers, providing everything from diapers and clothing to baby wipes and baby furniture.

Andrews was one of a dozen winners announced at the Wilmington event, which drew dignitaries such as Gov. John Carney, New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer and Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki.
The Jefferson Awards were started in 1972 and its founders included former first lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis and Sam Beard, a Delaware resident, who presented awards Monday.

Andrews said the idea for her charity came to her as she was dressing little Isabella in a onesie that had been donated to the clinic and that she earned with her points.

"I just thought to myself, 'I'll never be able to thank the donor who gave me those clothes. I could walk past them in the street and not know who they are. I'm so blessed to have a family and a community to come around me and help when I really needed it. How can I give back?'" she said. "I'm not a 501(c) organization, I'm just a young mom who made it her mission to help other moms."

Giovanna Andrews embraces News Journal President Tom Donovan after winning a medal for "Outstanding Service Benefitting Local Communities" during the seventh annual Jefferson Awards Awards Ceremony Monday, April 29, 2019, at The Queen Theater in Wilmington DE. (Photo: Saquan Stimpson/Special to The News Journal)

Now, Andrews spends time searching online for possible donors and has found success, receiving cases of diapers and other goods from both businesses and individuals, allowing her to help others who are in the same position she was only a short time ago.

She does it all with helpers, in between taking care of her child and working her new job with Wilmington City Council where she is social media and web content coordinator for Council President Hanifa Shabazz.

After Andrews accepted her award, she stood with her mother and Isabella in the hall of the Wilmington theater, taking in the moment.

She will be one of three Delaware Jefferson Award winners to advance to the national Jefferson Awards ceremony in Washington, D.C., in June.
"This is unbelievable. I feel like, 'Is this a mistake?'" said Andrews, whose Thousand Diaper Giveaway distributed more than 2,500 diapers to the local community in January at the Kingswood Community Center in Wilmington.

"When I think about the Jefferson Awards, I think about huge organizations, not little ol' me," she added.

This weekend she will host her next big giveaway.

Harper's Heart's Thousand Bib & Book Giveaway will be held Saturday, noon to 3 p.m. at Wilmington Public Library, 10 E. 10th St. The giveaway will include children's books, diapers, baby clothing, baby furniture and more to anyone who comes and asks.

Andrews was honored in the Outstanding Service Benefiting Local Communities category, which also included two other winners.
News Journal President Tom Donovan presented a medal to Rocco Malin for “Outstanding Service Benefitting Local Communities” during the seventh annual Jefferson Awards Awards Ceremony Monday, April 29, 2019, at The Queen Theater in Wilmington DE. (Photo: Saquan Stimpson/Special to The News Journal)

Rocco "Motorcycle Santa" Malin also received a medal from presenter Tom Donovan, publisher of The News Journal, a sponsor of the event. Malin leads a festive toy drive in Wilmington each winter for sick children at both Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children and the Ronald McDonald House of Delaware.

Donovan also presented a medal to Dr. Basilio Bautista, founder of the Philippine-American Physicians of Delaware Foundation. It established the first free health clinic in Dover, the Hope Medical Clinic, in collaboration with the Modern Maturity Center.

Delaware Jefferson Award medal honorees were also honored in six other categories.

• Outstanding Student-Led Service Projects - LEAD360: A team from Newark including Katie Hamelin, Grace Delaney, Rogelia Carrizales and Romelia Carrizales created their Manna Bag project to address the help the homeless in their community. They hosted an informational session for members of the community about the impact of homelessness and then helped assemble 300 bags filled with basic needs items to be distributed to the homeless.
Sammi Mitchell received a medal for "LEAD360 Activation Awards" during the seventh annual Jefferson Awards Awards Ceremony Monday, April 29, 2019, at The Queen Theater in Wilmington DE. (Photo: Saquan Stimpson/Special to The News Journal)

• LEAD360 Activation Awards (three winners): Sammi Mitchell for activating a 2018 Jefferson Awards-winning program, Buckets of Love, at her school, K-8 Academy MOT Charter. The Charter School of Wilmington Student Government Organization for activating Buckets of Love project at their school. And Bank of America for activating Buckets of Love as one of its Day of Giving projects, which sends 1,000 employees into their community to give back. Buckets of Love offers buckets of toys and craft items for children in need.
Nicole Waters received a medal for public service "New Castle County Government" during the seventh annual Jefferson Awards Awards Ceremony Monday, April 29, 2019, at The Queen Theater in Wilmington DE. (Photo: Saquan Stimpson/Special to The News Journal)

• Outstanding Service by Employees in the Workplace: Christiana Care Health System nurse Nicole McCarry, who began working with Hands International in 2014 when she and her daughter went on a 10-day medical mission to Antigua. McCarry is now on the Hands International's board and organizes missions, and also attends missions in countries such as Trinidad and Dominica. She will advance to the national Jefferson Awards in Washington, D.C.

• Outstanding Service by a Company: Bank of America donated $3 million in grants and matching gifts in Delaware last year as their employees averaged more than 100,000 volunteer hours last year through their Neighborhood Builders program.

Jane Lyons addresses the audience during the seventh annual Jefferson Awards Awards Ceremony Monday, April 29, 2019, at The Queen Theater in Wilmington DE. (Photo: Saquan Stimpson/Special to The News Journal)

• Outstanding Service by a Young American: Ursuline Academy senior Jane Lyons started Youth Overcoming Obstacles with her brother Patrick to help incarcerated teens at Ferris School. The organization provided sports equipment, culinary classes and clothing for interviews and work opportunities. They also started a re-entry fund.
St. Elizabeth High School received a medal for "Outstanding Service by a High School" during the seventh annual Jefferson Awards Ceremony Monday, April 29, 2019, at The Queen Theater in Wilmington DE. (Photo: Saquan Stimpson/Special to The News Journal)

- Outstanding Service by a High School: St. Elizabeth High School led a school-wide Day of Service. The school community donated and packed 135 grab-and-go food bags for Ronald McDonald House of Delaware, and 237 grab-and-go food bags and 148 cold weather bags for Emmanuel Dining Room. About 530 students participated with staff for a total of 1,070 volunteer hours. The school will also compete at the national Jefferson Awards.

Got a tip? Contact Ryan Cormier of The News Journal at rcormier@delawareonline.com or (302) 324-2863. Follow him on Facebook (@ryancormier), Twitter (@ryancormier) and Instagram (@ryancormier).

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Thousand Bib & Book Giveaway by Harper's Heart, a Delaware Jefferson Award-winning organization. The giveaway includes children's books, diapers, baby clothing, baby furniture and more.

WHEN: Saturday, noon to 3 p.m.

WHERE: Wilmington Public Library, 10 E. 10th St., Wilmington

COST: Free

MORE INFORMATION: instagram.com/harpers_heart