



California Youth Wins National Award for Heroic Service Activity

Boulder, CO, September 15, 2026 – Caymus Maxson, age 16, of Pacific Grove, California, has been named a winner of the 2026 **Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes**. The Barron Prize annually honors 25 outstanding young leaders who have made a significant positive impact on people, their communities, and the environment. Fifteen top winners each receive \$10,000 to support their service work or higher education.

Caymus created Trash Turtles to fight plastic pollution, promote sustainable living, and turn environmental awareness into action. Since 2020, her nonprofit has hosted over 50 beach cleanups, collected over six tons of trash, and recycled 52,000 cigarette butts. Her signature initiative, #LeaveWith3, challenges everyone to pick up three extra pieces of trash wherever they go and promotes the idea that small acts when multiplied can make a huge difference. Her team has also donated water refill stations to local schools, awarded \$8,500 in environmental scholarships, and built communal grassroots support through donations, grants, merchandise sales, and mission aligned collaborations. Caymus began her work as a 10-year-old after watching a tractor rake her local beach clean and then dump the plastic straws, bottle caps, and cigarette butts into the ocean. Disappointed, she resolved to protect the beach and its animals, especially nesting sea turtles.

She immediately drafted four ordinances -- no cigarettes, single-use plastics, polystyrene foam, or balloon releases on the beach. She presented them to the Mayor and City Council, who listened politely but did nothing. Disheartened but determined, Caymus created Trash Turtles to get rid of the beach trash herself. She has organized large-scale beach cleanups and has seen that as people pick up trash, their relationship with the environment often changes. She collaborates with Surfing's Evolution and Preservation Foundation, Keep Pinellas Beautiful, and Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots, and serves on the National Youth Council. She has continued to push for passage of her original four ordinances and in 2022, her town restricted smoking on the beach. In 2024, Florida instituted a statewide ban on intentional balloon releases. "I've come to understand that environmental issues usually stem from a normalization of everyday systems that have never been challenged," says Caymus. "That realization makes me hopeful, because it means that change is only one choice away."

"Nothing is more inspiring than stories about heroic people who have truly made a difference to the world," says T. A. Barron. "And we need our heroes today more than ever. Not celebrities, but heroes – people whose character can inspire us all. That is the purpose of the Barron Prize: to shine the spotlight on these amazing young people so that their stories will inspire others."

For more information, visit www.barronprize.org

Media contact:

Liz Ammirato liz@callprinc.com 914-299-3882
Cathy Callegari Public Relations, Inc.