



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FAYETTE COUNTY TEEN NAMED TOYS FOR TOTS YOUTH AMBASSADOR

Uniontown, PA – A Fayette County teen has been named a Youth Ambassador for the Toys for Tots Program.

Leah Hutchinson, 17, a senior at Frazier High School in Perryopolis, earned the distinction after volunteering with the organization for several years.

“It feels wonderful, but at the same time, you feel so much responsibility,” Hutchinson said.

Hutchinson said part of what she does is trying to spread the word about the program, which collects and distributes toys to less fortunate children during the Christmas season.

“(I want to) inspire young and old alike so that they understand the importance of giving back in their communities,” she said.

Hutchinson is the Youth Ambassador for Region I, which Toys for Tots Coordinator Dan Martin said extends from West Virginia to Maine. He noted that Hutchinson is one of two Youth Ambassadors from Pennsylvania and one of only 10 throughout the U.S.

“This is the first year for it, the first time ever,” he said. “I’m just excited that she got it.”

Hutchinson’s term began Oct. 1 and extends until Sept. 30, 2022. She received a proclamation from Fayette County Commissioners Dave Lohr, Vincent Vicites and Scott Dunn in recognition of her achievement.

Martin explained that coordinators such as himself were given the opportunity to nominate deserving youth volunteers. The Toys for Tots Foundation reviewed each submission before making selections.

“When they told me it was out there, I said, ‘I’ve got the perfect person.’ I submitted the papers and just waited to hear something,” Martin said.

Martin has been with Toys for Tots for 27 years and has been a coordinator for 24 of them. For the last seven years, he has worked side-by-side with Hutchinson.

“I watched her as she was growing up, and I told her mother, ‘She doesn’t think like the rest of the kids,’” Martin said.

He said Hutchinson’s maturity and ability to think “outside the box” set her apart from other kids her age.

Volunteer work, especially around the holidays, has become a tradition in her family, Hutchinson said. She has been doing it since she was a young child.

“I’ve worked seven years for Toys for Tots alone,” she said. “I’ve worked for other organizations as well.”

Hutchinson said she worked for a program called Special Santa when her military parents were stationed in Alaska. It was then taken over by Toys for Tots.

“I’ve worked with (organizations doing) baskets sent to soldiers, food drives, I’ve worked with church charities,” she said. “It was very big growing up.”

In fact, when Hutchinson first began volunteering at Toys for Tots, it was with her mother. Hutchinson said from the time she was born, when her older brother was just a Cub Scout, their mother would take them to do charity work.

“By the time I was 2, I would walk around, putting things in boxes,” she said.

As she got older, she became more and more active in volunteer work.

“It means so much,” she said. “Self-fulfillment and respect and love and care – all the things that seem to be lost in everyday life.”

Martin said Toys for Tots still is collecting new, unwrapped toys for infants through children up to age 12. The final day to register a child for the program is 1-5 p.m. Dec. 1 in the former Burlington Coat Factory space at the Uniontown Mall. Parents must present photo identification, proof of Fayette County residency, and an Access or SNAP card. They also must provide proof of the child’s date of birth, as well as the child’s medical card.

“We start collecting boxes Dec. 9, 10 and 11,” Martin said.

Distribution will begin Dec. 13 and 14.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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