

## Rotary Club of Cohoes 2017 Frank Heins Scholarship

By: Jessica Martinez- Peraza

Being involved in my Cohoes community through various service activities is something I enjoy doing. I am President of the National Honor Society at Cohoes High School, a member of the Character Education Club and a member of the Community Service Club. Throughout my years at Cohoes High School I have learned the value of service by contributing positively to my community. I enjoy serving people from many walks of life and different age groups. Doing community service is a priority rather than an obligation. I choose to give my time to help others above and beyond what is required and expected. My commitment to volunteering does not have a time limit. I believe that little acts of kindness contribute to a larger positive changes that we can see in our community.

Every Tuesday, I spend one hour at the Cohoes Senior Center teaching the young at heart about technology. I look forward to this program every week because I feel like I am making a difference to the senior citizens. The needs are different every week and people come with questions and are excited to learn. To commit to this weekly program, I have declined to be fully involved with the school track team because I cannot attend Tuesday practices and meets. Prioritizing Senior Tech 101 has been one of the most rewarding experiences I've had here in Cohoes. Not only do the seniors benefit from the weekly classes, but I am also learn from them as well. Watching the seniors try their hardest to achieve their goals really inspires me. No matter how difficult the task may be they never give up; they have showed me the value of perseverance.

Through the National Honor Society I am also a Peer Tutor. Helping my fellow students has offered me a one of a kind learning experience. It has refreshed my memory on certain topics and has improved my critical thinking skills. As a tutor, I model good study habits and help other students become more successful through positive peer pressure. Tutors usually work with struggling learners during study hall rather than after school. I have to do more of my own homework at night, but I like assisting classmates as they become academically successful and seeing them transform as learners. I am now a better problem solver because I adapt to meet each

student's unique needs and goals. This challenge that I have faced better prepares me for college and life as I will need to adapt, think flexibly, and meet the needs of others.

Character Ed Club includes mentoring at our district elementary schools. During these trips we build teamwork, responsibility, and compassion with the younger students. We do activities like the human knot, flip the tarp, and snowball with the kids. We emphasize practicing inclusion, kindness, and cooperation. As we strengthen their relationships they become more aware that their actions and words can help others. I like being a good role model for these kids but I also benefit from these trips. The younger students often make me reflect about how I can improve my own teamwork skills. Our goal is to set an example for the little kids, but our community building skills transfer into the high school as well.

The Community Service Club has facilitated two blood drives to provide an important resource for the larger community. I can donate blood, but the impact is bigger when others join in beside me. Before the blood drive, our club advertises and organizes the event to maximize participation. The club also organized the Hoops for Hope game to benefit local families affected by childhood diseases. Some of our very own teachers at Cohoes High School have been affected by these diseases. The community comes together to have a night of fun at a basketball game. After the game proceeds are given to the families in need. My experience with these families helps me not take my health and my opportunities for granted. We often get so wrapped on about the things that are happening in our own lives that we forget to be grateful. I like that I am able to give a little bit of hope and help to those who are less fortunate.

Outside of school I have volunteered at the Regional Food Bank with the St. Michaels Church. Being able to help at the Food Bank really made me appreciative for the experiences and opportunities that I have had. At the Food Bank I have helped organize the food, so it gets distributed to these families. There are many children and adults that are unemployed, homeless and hungry. Families who have to face the decision of either paying their bills or eating. Going to the local Food Bank has taught me how to be appreciative and compassionate towards others. I do not like to judge people, because you never know what they are going

through. I feel that it is extremely important to be grateful for all that you have and all of the wonderful opportunities that have been given to you.

Service is something that I am very passionate about. No matter where I go, I plan to prioritize my volunteer work just as I did in high school. At Ithaca College I plan to engage in service activities in my new school and local community. I plan to stay in touch with my senior friends and elementary school buddies and will hopefully be able to visit them during breaks and vacations. After college, I would like to come back to Cohoes to live and to work. Part of my adult life will include volunteering at the food bank and helping the Cohoes Community in even bigger ways. For me, life has more value when people give back.

One small act of kindness towards a person can make their day or maybe even change their life. Helping others is ultimately rewarding and has shaped me into the person I am today. I have had the chance to work with such a diverse range of people, and appreciate my lessons learned with them. I have not only experienced the value of service but the merits of perseverance, leadership, compassion, and patience. I understand that a small act of kindness can go indeed a long way.