

Pine-Richland senior earns Stars & Stripes Award for sensory room service project



TONY LARUSSA | Wednesday, May 12, 2021 2:43 p.m.

Miriam Layne of Richland didn't really know much about American Heritage Girls when she joined a chapter based at a church in Wexford.

But the second grader knew it was a chance to have fun with other girls her age.

Modeled after the Girl Scouts, the character development organization allows girls to earn a wide variety of badges to advance through the ranks along with camping trips and faith-based activities and service projects.

Layne, 18, recently completed an 11-year journey with the national organization by completing the work needed to earn its highest honor, the Stars and Stripes Award.

The Pine-Richland senior's project involved refurbishing a sensory room for children with special needs at Allison Park Church, where she attends with her family.

The church already had a small room where children with special needs could be taught, but it was not a suitable atmosphere for kids with sensory needs.

"I have been serving in my church's children's ministry for the past five years and have been asked to assist children with sensory needs from time to time," Layne said. "There were no suitable toys and teaching materials to support these children. My goal for this room was to create a safe and calming environment to support these children. I believe I have achieved this goal."

Despite the difficulties of completing the project while complying with covid pandemic restrictions, Layne was able to plan and designed the work, seek donations, recruit volunteers and set up tasks and work days.

Each step of the project had to be documented and submitted to the organization along with a narrative describing the leadership demonstrated by the candidate and the benefits of the work.

The project took about 190 hours to complete and involved repainting the room, creating murals that can be decorated each season by the children and covering fluorescent lights with screens painted in hues of blue to bathe the room in a peaceful ambience.



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Miriam Layne, 18, of Richland, left, receives the Stars and Stripes Award from Paula Heinricher, troop coordinator for a local chapter of American Heritage Girls. Layne received the award, which is the national organization's highest honor, for her project to refurbish a sensory room for children with special needs at Allison Park Church.

The room also was outfitted with cube organizers, a television, toys, furniture, lockers and other equipment and amenities.

“Throughout this process I have grown as a leader and organizer,” Layne said. “And Allison Park Church will be able to use this space to benefit children with special needs for many years to come.”

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