



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Head: Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley – Recognizing Inspiring Youth of the Year Candidates and Raising Funds to Help East Valley Club Members Pursue College Hopes and Dreams

Subhead: Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley Announce Finalists and Select Youth of the Year at Annual Celebration March 4, 2016, a premier youth recognition program, which brings awareness, hope and opportunity to our Valley's most deserving and inspiring teens.

Mesa, Arizona: February 17, 2016 - It's That Time of the Year ... for Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley to recognize and celebrate their finalists and announce the **Youth of the Year** on March 4th at the Arizona Grand Resort in Tempe Arizona from 5:30 – 9 p.m.

What is Youth of the Year?

Since 1947, Youth of the Year has been Boys & Girls Clubs of America's premier recognition program, celebrating the extraordinary achievements of Club members. Each year, one exceptional young person is chosen to be Youth of the Year at the Club (local) level, the Organization level, the State level, the Regional level and finally, the National level.

Youth of the Year participants embody the values of leadership, service, academic excellence and healthy lifestyles; they exemplify the critical impact of the Boys & Girls Club on the lives of young people. Through the Youth of the Year program, club youth showcase their talents and achievements, share their hopes and dreams, and work toward a bright and positive future. Youth of the Year participants are selected on the following criteria: Club Experience, Personal Brand, Academic Success, Leadership and Character, Healthy Lifestyles, Vision for the Future, Resiliency and Grit, Poise, Public Speaking, and Service.

These amazing candidates represent the voice and spirit of hope. **Inspiring all kids to lead. To succeed. To inspire.**

The 2016 East Valley Youth of the Year Candidates Are:

- Tacia Samaniego, Junior at Tempe High – Thunderbirds Branch, Guadalupe
- Faith Heath, Sophomore, McClintock High – North Tempe Branch
- Mikaela Figueroa, Senior, Gilbert High – Gilbert Branch
- Cara Begay, Junior, Queen Creek High – Queen Creek Branch

- Ilka Gallegos, Senior, Dobson High – Grant Woods Branch, Mesa
- Josh Lahs, Senior, South Ridge High – Gila River Branch, Komatke
- Jessie Vega, Sophomore, Skyline High – Stevenson Branch, Mesa
- Bryson Watson, Sophomore, Hamilton High – Gila River Branch, Sacaton
- Nigera Bell, Junior, Tempe High – Ladmo Branch, Tempe
- Charles Johnson, Junior, Chandler High – Compadre Branch, Chandler



The students and club members qualified as East Valley candidates based upon the following criteria:

- Club membership for at least two years
- Dedication to Home & Family, Moral, Character, Community Service, Service to the Club & Life Goals
- Submitted two written essays: *What the Boys and Girls Club Means to Me*, and *Why Post-High School Education is Important*

All candidates have the opportunity to compete at State, Regional and National levels.

“A valued component of the Boys & Girls Clubs programming is our Scholarship Program, which helps qualifying club members pursue their dreams of attending college,” stated Mark Hanke, President/CEO Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley. “Our programs are dedicated to advancing opportunities to our 36,000 youth in nine communities and at 12 branches, and these candidates deserve a chance to follow their academic goals,” Hanke said. “I truly wish them the best in their personal journeys leading to higher education.”

The **Youth of the Year** event is vital in raising necessary funds to provide scholarship and financial aid to qualifying members as well as supporting the programs and services offered at east valley local branches. The Scholarship Program has served more than 300 Club members who have been awarded scholarships - in addition to thousands of families who have received the financial aid necessary to move forward with higher education goals.

About Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley

Boys & Girls Clubs of the East Valley has served more than 36,000 youth with educational, fun and healthy programs and opportunities at our 12 branches and the Mesa Arts Academy for the past 50 years! Our mission is to fill the opportunity gap and provide necessary programs to school-aged youth between the ages of 5 and 18, who participate in after-school and summer activities in the areas of: education, recreation, peer leadership, substance abuse prevention, performing arts, and physical fitness, where members learn computer skills while using state-of-the-art technology, receive assistance with their schoolwork, and interact with trained staff and volunteers who serve as role models and mentors. Learn more at <http://www.clubzona.org/yoymediakit> , <https://www.facebook.com/clubzona>, and <https://twitter.com/clubzonabgc> .

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