

March 8, 2019

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Trib Total Media Outstanding Young Citizen Program

Re: Outstanding Young Citizen Scholarship for Nadine Oury

Dear Members of the Trib Outstanding Young Citizen Scholarship Selection Committee:

I am pleased and honored to convey my strongest possible recommendation for Nadine Oury, a senior at Winchester Thurston School who has been honored as one of the Elite Top 100 Outstanding Young Citizens. I have been pleased to have the opportunity to get to know Nadine well, initially as a community advisor for her scouting activities and for a portion of her community service work. As the current Chairman of the Board of Venture Outdoors, a Girl Scout lifetime member, former troop leader, and former member of the Board of our Girl Scout Council, I have worked with many outstanding high school students. Nadine is exceptional for her exemplary citizenship in multiple arenas, and shows remarkable promise for the future.

Nadine intends to study environmental policy and engineering, and her Girl Scout Gold Award project exemplified practical application of her citizenship values in the context of that field. The Gold Award is the highest leadership honor conferred by the Girl Scouts, and requires commitment, insight and dedication to achieve. Nadine recognized a need in her community, invested time and resources into finding a way to address that deficit, and took action to make a difference. Nadine deserves the Outstanding Young Citizen Scholarship because of her demonstrated commitment to use her talents to improve the environment and human connections to the environment, and because she has shown the ability to provide thoughtful and caring leadership.

I first worked with Nadine's Girl Scout troop in 2013, as a community member invited in for my expertise with outdoor activities. I assisted with a camping and canoeing trip in the Allegheny National Forest. Even then as a 6th or 7th grader, Nadine exhibited maturity, leadership and interest in the environment. She took the lead in planning and maintained commitment to the trip despite difficult weather. However, it was her Girl Scout Gold Award Project which really allowed me to see what she is capable of, and how hard she is willing to work for important causes.

Nadine's Gold Award Project was intended to bring community awareness to a remarkable local resource of greenspace and biological diversity, and coincidentally to try to increase the community's sense of connection to the environment. Her project was well-planned and beautifully executed, and showed her capability and future potential. She began planning years in advance, spent a significant amount of time in Linbrook Woodlands and researching the habitats she found there, perfecting her brochure and trail map to meet the requirements of the nonprofit Allegheny Land Trust, and preparing to lead the inaugural Venture Outdoors hike there.

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Venture Outdoors is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide the gear, guidance and inspiration to make outdoor recreation a part of people's lives. At Venture Outdoors, we expect volunteers to undergo training in order to insure that our programming will meet our standards of safety and excellence. Nadine took our leadership training, and impressed me with her planning and execution of the program. Her preparation and research clearly consumed many hours, and it showed. She functioned in a mature leadership role, both gracious and scholarly. Her talking points were fascinating and the delivery captured the attention and imaginations of our participants, who ranged in age from elementary school age children to retirees.

Nadine ultimately spent more than 97 hours of work spanning two years. She researched habitats, visited the site multiple times and defined a three-mile hiking loop that crossed distinct habitats, and would provide some challenge and exercise while remaining accessible to most ages. She created a map and informational pamphlet, then moved to the second phase of her project to not only educate, but also show people on a fundamentally emotional level why to care about our remaining greenspaces. She then met with me and worked to define pacing, alternative paths, and appropriate talking points coordinated with rest breaks. Her talking points included the importance of clean water and the environmental impact of stormwater runoff, the ecological significance of vernal pools, and the importance of biodiversity in the natural environment.

From among the many topics and successes, I'd like to share one brief anecdote from the program which exemplifies the spark and potential that I see in Nadine. Her hiking route passed through forested habitats, and she did a fair amount of tree identification, talking about features of various trees, pointing out Pennsylvania's state tree (hemlock), etc. Then she took time to explain recent scientific research finding that trees actually form communities, and use their underground root systems to communicate information and to share resources. She explained how scientists have learned that a community of trees can and will use their interconnected root systems to provide needed nutrients to a sick tree, for example. After pausing to allow these concepts to sink in, Nadine pointed out that this is the kind of community that anyone might want to be a part of, and certainly the kind of community that humans should be striving for. Watching the faces of her listeners, who were amazed and delighted with the research that she shared, and then inspired by her final point, I was proud of Nadine's efforts, and the thought and insight she had brought to the project.

In terms of impact, many of the participants lived just beyond the boundaries of the park, yet had not known that these trails existed. The Venture Outdoors post-activity survey revealed that 100% were completely satisfied with the trip leadership and with the overall activity. Quotes: "Our group was interactive, our leader inspired conversations." "She did a wonderful job and made it very interesting." "The trip was led extremely well, but it was the extras that mattered..." "Lots of things to see, and the trip leader made sure to keep the pace just right for the whole group." "It was nice that it was suitable for all ages." Survey responses further indicated that participants learned "About a great nature resource right next door," "cool tree facts", "how man and nature interact to produce unique environments...", "birds, wildflowers, trees, vernal pools, etc". Participants were 100%

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interested in returning to the site or pursuing similar programs, indicating that she has achieved her goals of inspiring new connections among people and community greenspaces.

Nadine is hard-working, insightful, and cares deeply about her community; she embodies youthful citizenship. Based on the highly selective universities that have granted her early admission already, I know that she also excels in the classroom and has gone above and beyond in leadership service to her school community as well. We at Venture Outdoors are pleased that she has continued to be active, now as a full-fledged Volunteer Trip Leader, with our organization. She will make you proud to have included her among your honorees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alice Johnston", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alice S. Johnston