



# Outstanding Community Service Projects Receive Association's Youth Awards

Four youth groups received PSATS Youth Awards at the Annual Educational Conference. Winning projects include a township records management project, the creation of a STEM education program, the construction of Adirondack chairs and planting of a pollinator garden, and a new gaga ball pit at a township park.

BY HANNA MARTIN / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**D**uring the nation's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, PSATS is looking to the future of local government leadership as the country reflects on its past. During Wednesday's general session at the Annual Conference, PSATS awarded four youth groups with PSATS Youth Awards for outstanding projects that

improve life in PSATS member townships. As part of the recognition, each of the groups received a \$500 check and a plaque in front of the PSATS membership.

PSATS established the Youth Awards Contest in 1993 to recognize outstanding community service contributions made by youth organizations in Pennsylvania's townships of the sec-

ond class. The program recognizes four winning projects each year. Following are descriptions of this year's winning efforts.

## **Lincoln Intermediate Unit, Adams County**

Students from the Lincoln Intermediate Unit partnered with Mount Joy Township in Adams County for

“This is an ongoing project that **helps improve the township's recordkeeping system** while giving students meaningful, real-world job training.”



**Lincoln Intermediate Unit received a PSATS Youth Award for its service learning project in Mount Joy Township, Adams County. From left are PSATS President Jay Wilkes; PSATS Executive Board member Jeffrey Shaffer; Christine Demas, Mount Joy Township supervisor; Melissa Wagner, Lincoln Intermediate Unit special education teacher; and Sandra Yerger, Mount Joy Township supervisor.**

a hands-on service-learning project. Twice a month, students worked closely with township staff on a records management program, reviewing and organizing township files before scanning documents for digital storage. Township staff taught the students how to properly categorize and file public records and encouraged them to ask questions.

The project not only helped the township get its records organized but also gave students experience in an office environment, teaching such workplace skills as accountability, accuracy, organization, timekeeping, and communication. The township plans to extend the opportunity for students to help with projects again this year.

“Students have successfully taken ownership of their assigned tasks, working collaboratively with township staff and building a growing independence and confidence in an office environment,” said Special Education Teacher Melissa Wagner. “Working together in an office setting, students learned how to divide responsibilities, support one another, and communicate effectively to complete shared goals. This is an ongoing project that helps improve the township’s record-



**Students from Lincoln Intermediate Unit worked with Mount Joy Township on a records management project, reviewing, organizing, and scanning documents in an office setting.**

keeping system while giving students meaningful, real-world job training.”

### **StemStrong, Bucks County**

After volunteering at a STEM summer camp offered by the Bucks County Intermediate Unit, Council Rock North High School sophomores

Avi Abrol and Dillon Lind were inspired to found the StemStrong program to teach children about science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) in Bensalem, Warminster, and Wrightstown townships, also in Bucks County.

As part of the ongoing education

# Youth Awards

“We hoped **these kids would be excited about STEM** based on our visits.”



Dillon Lind and Avi Abrol founded the StemStrong program, leading children in age-appropriate STEM projects.

program, Abrol and Lind lead elementary school-aged children in engaging, age-appropriate projects focused on STEM topics, including how catapults work, paper airplanes fly, and more. At the conclusion of the session, each child receives a certificate of participation.

The program is growing, and Abrol and Lind have developed a website in hopes of expanding it. Because the group was unable to attend the conference, PSATS Executive Director David Sanko presented the award to Abrol and Lind at a Wrightstown Township supervisors meeting in May.

“We targeted underserved areas so our work benefits kids in foster homes and after school programs,” Lind says. “We found that many of the kids we worked with had limited STEM resources or influences at home or school. We hoped these kids would be excited about STEM based on our visits. So far, we have worked with about 100 kids and hope to grow that number.”

“We wanted to see, ‘Do other kids

Council Rock North High School sophomores Dillon Lind (*far left*) and Avi Abrol (*center*) received a Youth Award from PSATS Executive Director Dave Sanko at a Wrightstown Township meeting.



have the same opportunities as we have, and can we help them foster creativity and innovation through STEM?” Abrol says. “We plan to continue to mentor kids and help them within their community science fairs or get them to the state or even national level science fairs.”

### **Girl Scout Troop 4044, Chester County**

Upland Farm Park and Pickering Valley Elementary School in Upper Uwchlan Township, Chester County, are the sites of new Adirondack chairs and a butterfly garden thanks to Girl Scout Troop 4044.

As part of Anjani Gurthy’s Silver Award Take Action Project, the scouts built and installed four Adirondack chairs at Upland Farm Park and designed and planted a pollinator garden at Pickering Valley Elementary School. Gurthy led scouts to learn how to assemble the chairs and care for pollinator-friendly plants, scheduling volunteers in small groups to complete the work.

Tasks included building, painting, and decorating the chairs; planting and watering plants in the pollinator garden; and organizing tools and materials. Additionally, Gurthy provided instructions for future scout troops to replicate and expand the project in other community spaces, and school staff and community members will perform ongoing upkeep of the project.

“The Adirondack chairs at Upland Farms are used by an estimated 50 to 75 people per day, while the butterfly garden engages students, staff, and visitors in hands-on environmental learning,” Gurthy says. “The project initiated community action by involving seven younger Girl Scouts in workshops, teaching them woodworking, gardening, and leadership skills, and encouraging continued service. As a result, the community experienced improved recreational and educational spaces, increased social interaction,

and greater awareness of environmental stewardship and youth-led service.”

### **Boy Scout Troop 50, Mercer County**

Visitors to Hempfield Township Park in Mercer County can now enjoy a round of gaga ball after members of

Boy Scout Troop 50 constructed a new gaga ball pit as Cash Barber’s Eagle Scout project. Under Barber’s leadership, troop members researched gaga ball pit designs, collected monetary and material donations, and constructed the pit at the local park. Scouts also worked with the township to coordi-



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# Youth Awards

“The project initiated community action by involving seven younger Girl Scouts in workshops, teaching them woodworking, gardening, and leadership skills and encouraging continued service.”



As part of Anjani Gurthy's Silver Award Take Action Project, scouts from Girl Scout Troop 4044 installed a pollinator garden at Pickering Valley Elementary School and built Adirondack chairs for Upland Farm Park in Upper Uwchlan Township, Chester County.

nate transportation of the turf flooring, which the township donated. More than 10,000 residents use the park, and the new gaga ball pit provides expanded recreation opportunities for residents of five nearby municipalities. Barber plans to maintain the pit through regular staining and hopes to add an Eagle Scout plaque to the structure.

“I hoped to accomplish another way to encourage kids to get outside — to provide a safe place to play without electronics,” Barber says. “The group learned teamwork, communication skills, how to follow directions, and construction skills.”

## Apply for PSATS Youth Awards

If your township has youth groups completing work that betters the community, encourage them to apply for a PSATS Youth Award! Applications for the 2027 PSATS Youth Awards are due **December 31, 2026**. Eligible



PSATS President Jay Wilkes (far left) and Executive Board member Jeffrey Shaffer (second from left) present Anjani Gurthy (third from left) Lila Henry (third from right) from Girl Scout Troop 4044 with a Youth Award. Accompanying them are Upper Uwchlan Township Manager Tony Scheivert and Code Enforcement Director Rhys Lloyd (far right).



**Eagle Scout Cash Barber (third from left) receives a Youth Award from PSATS President Jay Wilkes (far left) and Executive Board member Jeffrey Shaffer (second from left). Barber is accompanied by his father, Dan Barber; Deb Bartosh, Hempfield Township secretary; and Jon Ross, Hempfield Township supervisor (far right).**

entrants include all K-12 established youth groups that have at least three members, such as 4-H clubs, scout troops, civic service organizations, religious groups, and school groups.

Projects must have a major impact on one or more townships of the second class and should provide an opportunity for youth groups to learn more about local government. For more information and to apply, visit [psats.org/psats-youth-awards/](http://psats.org/psats-youth-awards/). ♦



**Cash Barber led scouts from Boy Scout Troop 50 in building a gaga ball pit at Hempfield Township Park.**

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Title \_\_\_\_\_