



**JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER
AWARDS**

2007 – 2008

ESSAYS

JOE KORDICK YOUTH CHARACTER AWARDS 2007 – 2008

The Joe Kordick Youth Character Award recognizes young people whose lives and achievements demonstrate an enduring commitment to qualities associated with good character and whose beliefs, attitudes, and actions have consistently exemplified the Six Pillars of Character – Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship:

- ☆ Uncompromising integrity and courage demonstrated by a willingness to do the right thing despite social pressure or personal risk**
- ☆ Generosity of spirit and willingness for self-sacrifice in devotion to helping others**
- ☆ Community service in working for the common good**
- ☆ Perseverance and inner strength enabling the young person to overcome physical, financial, or other difficulties.**

This award is named in honor of the late Joe Kordick, founding Chairman of CHARACTER COUNTS! of Martin County.

ESSAY TOPIC

“The CHARACTER COUNTS! program has been in Martin County for 12 years. Think how the Six Pillars of Character have played a role in your life. Write about one or more of these character traits and describe specific examples of how you have applied the traits in your life, in your school, in your family, or in your community.”

**JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER AWARD
FINALISTS**

2007 – 2008

**HIGH SCHOOL
ESSAYS**

Liam Lloyd
Clark Advanced Learning Center

Liam Lloyd
Clark Advanced Learning Center

I am grateful for this opportunity to write down my thoughts about some of the character traits which embody achievement, sacrifice, commitment, and perseverance. My personal view of character is that it is the end result of how one reacts to adversity or trials. Sometimes it is so difficult to remain calm and focused when unexpected or disappointing events occur. We are faced with choices of giving up, getting discouraged, and believing that what we have worked for and stand for is not going to amount to anything. At times circumstances will seem to mount up in a less than positive way. That's when commitment must come in and take over your fears and doubts. Commitment is a choice, and it's the best choice. If it were not for the Lord's help my efforts would be in vain.

When I think of my status of Cadet Major in Civil Air Patrol (CAP), I can't help but credit commitment, as it tells the world how faithful you will be to a certain cause or a treasured belief. Through this great program, I am able to help younger teenagers develop their self-confidence, respect, sense of maturity and further their leadership ability. I have been given the leadership role of cadet commander in my squadron, where the younger cadets look up to me for guidance, training, and just general support in time of need.

But at one time I almost quit the program entirely after repeatedly being overlooked for promotion. This was a time of great testing and trial for me because I loved the program so much. I had put my own ambition aside to keep going because I knew that the longer I stayed, the more I could help the younger cadets. In the end I emerged the better for it, and was totally surprised with more promotions than I could have imagined. If I had quit, I would never have known the level of achievement I could attain and would have missed the honor of achieving Cadet Major rank, which only 4% of the entire cadet population in the United States have achieved! Needless to say, I am so glad I decided to keep my commitment. Now, I can clearly see how to encourage others to keep persevering.

I am also proud of my commitment to my church community. It is an area which I thoroughly enjoy because I am giving back to society. A special way in which I serve my community is being a Kids Church teacher at my local church. It warms my heart to see the bright smiles of kids as they come to class, call out my name, wave to me, or tell their parents I am their teacher. Making an impression on a young child's life in a positive manner is of immeasurable value to me. Having a parent thank me is a reward which I do not take lightly, for it conveys the parent's trust that their child is safe with me. That type of trust does not come easy. It takes commitment.

**Nancy Maloch
Jensen Beach High School**

Nancy Maloch
Jensen Beach High School

Last Christmas, while most families were decorating their Christmas tree, my family was traveling to Africa, to climb the breathtaking 19,400 foot Mount Kilimanjaro. After successfully reaching the top, Uhuru Peak, I feel that I can do anything in the world that I choose to pursue. My next challenging goal is to get accepted into the United States Air Force Academy, and have an unbelievable four year college experience like no other. I truly believe that my understanding of the importance of respect, citizenship, and responsibility has molded me into the caring individual I am today.

I have developed a deep passion for volunteering and giving back to my community. From coaching YMCA volleyball teams to serving hot meals at a soup kitchen, I have enjoyed every minute that I devote to other people that are not as fortunate as I am. Jensen Beach High School's Key Club is a service organization that I have been actively involved in since I was a freshman. This club has allowed me to develop as a responsible, confident leader and to help people in my community and communities all around the world. My favorite service project is raising money for a UNICEF program that sponsors a girl's soccer team in Kenya; this program teaches young girls about HIV prevention and allows them to forget, for just a couple hours, their countless problems with their health, their family, and their future. Having traveled to Africa, I have numerous memories that will always remind me to help others whenever and however I can.

After overcoming Mount Kilimanjaro, my confidence was given a huge lift, and I realized that I wanted to surround myself with individuals who are constantly being challenged and held at high standards. Later, I realized that these individuals are found predominantly in our military. So, I joined the AFJROTC program at my school, and learned about the importance of citizenship and respect. I learned that no matter what rank or position you receive, it is always important to respect the people around you, especially those below you. After only a couple of weeks of marching instruction, I decided to challenge myself and volunteer to present a game ball with my fellow cadets at the next basketball game. I practiced hard, and at the game, I successfully commanded my fellow cadets. We looked sharp and united, and it was a great feeling working together with my classmates, trusting them enough and respecting them enough to go in the front of the entire school, and do something we had just learned. This is my second semester of AFJROTC, and I was actually just promoted to second in command of the entire corps. I am the Deputy Commander, and a first lieutenant. My previous Mission Support position required a lot of responsibility with helping my staff members, organizing our data base, and ensuring all of my duties were fulfilled with a 110% effort.

Recently, I was interviewed by the Stuart News for the Student of the Year. In addition, Mrs. Featherstone, my principal, asked me to go to a Martin County Leadership luncheon with her and speak to adults about my high school experience and future ambitions. Lastly, I was selected by Senator Nelson's and Senator Martinez's committee boards for an interview for a nomination into the Air Force Academy.

I owe my relentless drive to challenge myself to be the best I can be, to the traits of respect, citizenship, trustworthiness, responsibility, and caring that have all fostered my present achievement. I know there is an exciting, challenging road ahead of me, but with these strong traits, I know that I will be able to overcome any obstacle I face in the future.

Chelsea Schaffer
Martin County High School

Chelsea Schaffer
Martin County High School

On Memorial Day weekend 1992, my life was forever changed. At the age of two, I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes. Being so young, I was not able to comprehend the severity of the chronic disease I would constantly be battling; nor could I understand the possible long-term effects juvenile diabetes would forever have on my life.

When I turned 12, I was a speaker at the Walk to Cure Diabetes luncheon in front of 300 people. Since that day, I have spoken at more than 20 events ranging from Chamber of Commerce breakfasts to Palm Beach galas. I am currently the Youth Ambassador for the Greater Palm Beach Juvenile Diabetes Chapter.

Currently at 17 years old, and 15 years after being diagnosed, I am as strong as ever. I am on the insulin pump which keeps my health under excellent control. I have learned not only to accept the fact I have diabetes, but do all I can to raise money for awareness and a cure and to help improve the life of all diabetics. Five years ago, I helped my family organize the first "Walk to Cure Diabetes" in the Treasure Coast. Our most recent walk in March 2007 had 600 walkers and raised over \$100,000. I organized my own walk team which consisted of over 100 of my closest friends, family and neighbors and raised over \$1,100.

Throughout my four years in high school, I have been the president of my class. Having this position allowed me to participate in over 150 school and community projects. Our projects have ranged from cooking underprivileged families Thanksgiving dinners to providing our senior football players with "Good Luck" cookies. No matter how small or big a deed is, it is a wonderful feeling to be able to make people smile.

Overall, I have tried to live my life by one motto: "Treat others as you want to be treated yourself". Regardless of race, gender or beliefs, every individual should be treated with the same amount of respect. I have built my moral beliefs on the six pillars of character counts. By incorporating respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, citizenship, and trustworthiness into everyday life, I realize that anything can be achieved.

I know that everything in life happens for a reason, which is why I rarely complain over the fact I have diabetes. I have tried to use what I have to help others fighting the same battles. Not only do I participate in Juvenile Diabetes events, but I have helped raise money for causes such as March of Dimes, Breast Cancer, American Heart Association, and many more. There is nothing more important in this world than helping others.

Having diabetes has taught me leadership skills, responsibility, and independence which are all characteristics I plan on bringing with me to college and continuing to practice for the rest of my life. I know these traits will help me flourish. Living a diabetic life has motivated me to become a pediatric endocrinologist and help other children who are fighting the same battle I am and let them know you can move forward in spite of it!

Winston McAdoo
South Fork High School

Winston McAdoo
South Fork High School

George Bernard Shaw said it best when he proclaimed: "We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future." Many young people often think of responsibility as a burden or unwarranted duty, but I have found it to be a major source of personal power. We are powerless to change the behaviors that we do not take responsibility for. When we shift fault or make excuses, we give up our personal power - the power to make a difference. From as early as I can remember, I decided to employ my personal power and commit to responsible character and development at home, at school, and in my community.

Coming from meager means and being raised under the inspiring influence of a praying grandmother, I was taught by example about the importance of hard work, perseverance and giving back. I found reassurance in learning about people like my great, great-grandfather who had "made it" in spite of his disadvantaged upbringing. When I say "made it", I do not mean financial success: rather, he rose above unfortunate circumstances with admirable integrity and character. I, too, realize that the foundation for success begins with taking responsibility for oneself including a commitment to help my family. To understand how, I now care for my aged grandfather and disabled dad without my social life coming to a halt altogether. This is just a glimpse into the management of my own life as well as that of my family. Furthermore, in addition to domestic duties, I also work part-time which serves as a resource for my personal, as well as family household expenses. My work ethic defines my commitment to my work, and, at the same time, to my family.

I am fortunate in regard to education. My grandfather had to quit school after the tenth grade to support his family. This was around The Depression; he had to do what was necessary for his family to live. Prior to my mother's generation, I am not aware of any family members getting any kind of advanced education beyond the high school level. Even with this background, my mother always stressed to me the importance of an education. Because of her attitude about education and her sacrifices, I am currently a senior in high school who has always managed to maintain a 3.0 or better grade point average. As a person who strives to do my best, I have also developed other important character traits that have profoundly impacted other areas of my life beyond academics. As an avid football player for the past ten years, I have received two honors in particular, that have significant meaning to me. When I was only thirteen years old, I was selected captain of my football team. My coach told me that he selected me, not only because of my leadership abilities and my self-discipline, but because of my determination and ability to get my teammates to push themselves. The second award that I received was the Tri-Student Player of the Week Award. Despite my team losing the Tri-County championship, I received the award for keeping my team together and leading them throughout the tournament (not as the most valuable player, but as a role model). I know that coaches expect more from their team members, not only as a player, but as a person. I personally have high expectations for myself.

I could not have had a better mentor than my former boss and coach. Very early on when I went to work for him, he taught me to do right by the customer and the rest would take care of itself. A big part of being a responsible citizen is doing the right thing and giving back to the community. My love for my community has led me to volunteer at different levels. I have volunteered during the "Clean Sweep" at local beaches, American Red Cross Blood Drive, and as a youth league football coach. However, my most fulfilling experience is serving as a mentor/tutor for my church's youth ministry. I am matched with a fifth grader who has grown and evolved as both a student and a person. Every other Saturday we get together and work on science projects, homework, or just throw a football ball back and forth. It is an honor working with wonderful, giving people of all ages and backgrounds who try to make my community a better place to live.

Not a day goes by that I do not acknowledge my God-given talents and gifts and determine how I can use them for not only myself, but for others. I want to be remembered in life not in terms of net worth, but with kind words from my good deeds. My current focus is not on changing my past circumstances, but on setting high expectations for my future. The high expectations that I set for myself are reflected in the choices and decisions that I am faced with on a daily basis. As a teenager, I constantly face the challenges of peer pressure. My ability to stand apart from "the crowd" gives me the strength to think and act as a responsible individual. I do not feel the need to do, say, or think something that I know is wrong. My decisions reflect my values and morals. I have choices to make and my future is, to a great extent, dependent on the actions I take now. For this reason, I choose not to get side-tracked from life's challenges and be defeated. Instead, I choose to rely on my faith, determination, and perseverance in reaching my goals for my education, career, family, and receipt of the Joe Kordick Youth Character Award.

Cecily Ramos
South Fork High School

Cecily Ramos
South Fork High School

When I was growing up, I was always taught manners and how to be a "good little girl." I put all my thanks to God, my grandparents, and parents for raising me the way they did. All of the pillars of character have helped me throughout my life, but I can think of four that really stuck with me. They are fairness, caring, respect, and trustworthiness.

My dad always tells me I would make a great judge, because if I was to sentence him and he was wrong, regardless of him being my dad, he would be going to jail. Joking he may be, but he is not lying about the fact that I am fair. Being fair to me is extremely important. I can remember many times when I haven't been treated fairly. I don't want other kids to experience that, so I do my best to spread this good characteristic. I remember there was a girl who played a key role in making our choir what it is, she didn't have enough money to go on the end-of-the-year trip. I gave her the rest of the money in my account because I felt she deserved to go, and I thought it was fair to reward her for her hard work.

My mom continues to mention that I care too much. I don't think that's possible. She says that I would cry if an animal I didn't know was to pass away, which is true, but that doesn't mean I care TOO much. I can care more, I think. It is nice to feel like someone cares about you. I believe it got me through much of my life, and I would like to return the favors many people have given me. I can recall on numerous occasions that I have taken the time to help friends in need by just talking and/or hugging them to show them I care and that I am there for them. They always tell me that I have helped by just taking the time to be there for them and to listen to them.

"Treat others the way you want to be treated," is actually another way of saying, "give respect to get respect." I've heard these sayings many times throughout my life. They are a great part of why I am respectful. I am a supervisor at my job, which I have had for more than a year now, and there are cases where some of the employees are older than me, yet are not supervisors. I was asked the question, "What do you do when an older employee has to be told what to do?" I replied by saying, "I would give them respect in hopes that they would be respectful to me in return."

Ever since I was younger, I learned to be trustworthy. I have always been someone that people can look to for advice. I am able to keep information confidential. I have been a treasurer in my choir for the past two years, which requires great trust. I am also a treasurer in the Drama Club. As a supervisor, I take inventory and have access to the stock room. Also, I handle significant amounts of cash in the course of my employment, thus underscoring the importance of trustworthiness.

I live Character Counts on a daily basis. Without these pillars I don't know how I would have gotten through this far in my life. These characteristics are not only a part of how I act but a part of who I am.

Jared Taws
Stuart Community High School

Jared Taws
Stuart Community High School

When I turned fourteen years old, my father said to me, "Now is the time that you learn that responsibility involves doing hard work and dedicating yourself to something you love." In the following four years, I found out what he meant by learning the components of responsibility. I learned that I need to help others in need, and show love in a way that portrays who I am. I am the type of person who helps people; this is what I love. I find fulfillment in showing compassion, fairness, trustworthiness, respect, citizenship and responsibility. I also learned that I like to help others in need and show others how much I enjoy helping them.

After hurricane Katrina hit Florida and Louisiana my church received word about an area in Louisiana that was in dire need of help. Me and about 15 other teenagers my age went to Turkey Creek, a small town in Louisiana, where many people needed roof repairs and some houses needed replacement of entire walls. We replaced a man's roof and another lady needed repairs from water damage. We took one day to visit an area where houses lay on the roads, cars piled on top of each other, and where people had died. Regardless of the destruction, we lifted the spirits of those in the town.

The activity I love to do the most is to work on houses for the needy. The organization, Recreation, is a donation only group in North Carolina that provides maintenance and remodeling for the needy. Churches from all over the United States meet at Recreation to do work on houses of the less fortunate in the state of North Carolina. I have gone for 3 years and have done roofing, painting, wall removing, and floor securing of a house that had caved in. We all work long hours on these houses, but the greatest benefit from this is the looks on the owner's eyes and expression on their faces. When we first meet them they are gloomy and sad eyed, but after a few days of us cheering them up, they have the widest smiles. These needy people don't trust anyone around them, but once they see we are there to help they gain amazing trust in us.

This past summer, I worked with Recreation and my church on a job in North Carolina for a lady with brain cancer. Her house was falling in around her, so we helped rebuild her roof and paint her house. I remember walking into her house and seeing hundreds of pictures of her family. She was so delighted to see me. By showing my interest in her family, I gained her respect which felt better than any new roof could provide.

I feel like all of the pillars of Character Counts are engraved into whom I am today. Every day I reach out for friends that need help. My friend, Dylan, calls me in case he has no one else to help him rebuild his father's gas station. This is I do free of charge. My motto is to live by example, and be the best I can be to assist others who need a helping hand.

**JOE KORDICK
YOUTH CHARACTER AWARD
FINALISTS**

2007 – 2008

**MIDDLE SCHOOL
ESSAYS**

Lindsay Hoffman
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Lindsay Hoffman
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

The six pillars of character benefit everyone in different ways. There's trustworthiness when you are reliable and have the courage to do the right thing. Respect is when you are considerate of the feelings of others. Responsibility is taking control of yourself and making the right choices. Fairness is working together with others and being open minded. Caring shows you think about other people and giving them a helping hand. Last but not least is citizenship. Citizenship is helping out the community by making it better for the people around you. In a point in everyone's life they experience or see these pillars of character. Some people don't notice how much their kindness is helping out someone but it comes from the heart. Out of the six pillars of character caring and citizenship really have impacted my life and changed me the most, making me a better person.

The definition of caring in the American Heritage Dictionary is to be concerned or interested about something. Not only should caring be about being concerned or interested but really take action and help out people. Last summer, I took a trip to Daytona Beach with my church youth group. We stayed at a church for six days. Two days of the six my group had to watch and care for children that couldn't afford to go to a regular summer camp. The organization we were with picked up the kids in a van and brought them back to the church site where we were staying. The church had a gymnasium next to it so we played games like basketball, volleyball, and soccer with them. At first, I was nervous about taking care of these children because they would be rough and not listen to the rules. As time went on though I bonded with many of them and got to know their names, personality, and what they liked to do. It made me sad because those kids don't have the same advantages like us. What we take for granted they think of it as being something they have been looking forward for the whole year. While we were looking after the kids one day I went over to a coloring table. One little girl was writing something but I wasn't sure at first. While I was talking with the other girls there the girl writing something asked me how to spell "stepdaddy." I told her and then asked her what she was writing. She read me the letter which contained, "Dear Stepdaddy, I love you so much and can't wait till you get out of jail." Then she looked up at me and said, "I love my stepdaddy so much and when he gets out of jail we are going to the movies!" After she said that a huge smile spread across her face. When that little girl said that I realized that those kids don't really have the same things we do. Every single one of those kids I looked after for those two days I cared for and put one hundred percent of my effort to them. I played so many games with them and when the day was over was sad because I really cared about them and wanted to help them to better their lives.

Citizenship is the other pillar that I think about a lot. Saying you are going to help out the community, but actually doing it and feeling great about what you do is something different. Also during the summer on the trip to Daytona Beach we went to a Braille Library. When you go to a library you check out your books and do research. Behind the scenes is something you would never expect. For two days we spent six hours each day helping people run the library. Not only was the library immense but it seemed like millions of tapes piled high in carts and shelves filled all the rooms. Our job was to sort tapes, stack them, and put them on shelves. It took a lot of patience and hard work. While there, we met so many people that worked and volunteered. From the day we came into the library and the moment we stepped out the people there had smiles on their faces and appreciated what we were doing. It was boring at first but having the feeling that said, "Hey, you really made a difference today and worked hard at it," made me think that I was successful. Being a good citizen played a big role in what I did.

Throughout my life I have participated in Girl Scouts, volunteering at the Humane Society, and participated in church by volunteering in the community. All of these experiences I enjoy and it helps out other people. These character builders I will carry throughout my life. Everyday is a new day and I want to make it count by having good character.

Leticia Lopez
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Leticia Lopez
Dr. David L. Anderson Middle School

Character does count for me every day of my life. I have experienced these traits in my life everyday because I believe in them in my school, home and in my community. Of the six pillars I have chosen to speak about caring and respect.

Recently I had the experience of realizing how important it is for me to see my family. I have a younger brother and a younger sister. When my Dad had a serious accident at work it was more than an accident, it was a very scary moment for me. I did not realize how much it takes to become a Mother because my Mother had to take care of my dad and could not attend to my brother and sister. My Dad was not working and my Mom was responsible to make sure his needs were taken care of.

My brother and sister are a full time job and I certainly did not realize that. I now had to get up earlier for school, get home earlier and fit in my own life with my family. Since my Dad worked long hours as a landscaper I found it even more demanding because now he is home and he is getting very itchy to get back to work. There sometimes does not seem like enough time in the day and night. I find myself more involved then ever. Since my parents came here from another country it is even harder. They want me to get a good education so I don't have to live a hard life when I grow up and go to College. The word caring has a new meaning for me and I can understand why concern for other is such an important trait. I sometimes feel like my life is hard, but I know that my family appreciates everything that I do. How would I have gotten to this point without them?

As I watch all the times that we do collections at school to help other people and think about how I can get more involved with these activities. Now I sometimes look at other students and say to myself, you don't know what you would be in for if you had some of my problems. I am thankful because everyday gets better and better for me and my family who I care about so much. Caring about others is more rewarding than having enough money to live on.

I consider myself as a very respectful person who knows that not only should I respect my adults, but respect everyone. I sometimes see children at the school saying things which are disrespectful to other students. The classroom teachers need my greatest respect. I know not only is it the way I speak to them but it is in my actions. I never find myself wanting to look at other people's property without first asking and I don't want to sneak in on their private talks.

I also learned there are certain students that sometimes are not the most popular. Those are the students that I seem to hang with, since I am not a very outgoing person who has a lot of friends. I also help other students who have problems with English. Because I was born here I can help since I know the language well. I feel like some students don't respect the Non-English speaking students. My parents cannot understand all the mail and phone calls that they get so I know it is difficult for them to be part what goes on. The lack of communication sometimes hurts them.

I have learned to treat people the way that they want to be treated, but even if they won't I will. I try to be the good person that my parents and their parents want me to be so I can pass it down to my family members. I have become a better person from my overwhelming experiences, bit it has taught me many good lessons.

Nadia Bhagudas
Hidden Oaks Middle School

Nadia Bhagudas
Hidden Oaks Middle School

Showing character is important as going to school. I have applied character counts traits all throughout my life. Fairness, caring, and responsibility are some traits I have used in my life.

First, I have demonstrated fairness in my school numerous times. Illustrating fairness in my school is a regular activity I perform everyday. Talking to everyone at my school is a hard task, yet I still manage to do it. By doing this I try not to leave any of my peers out and try to be fair and just. I also attempt to choose new partners every time a new project comes about. I try to vary who I work with. On my science fair project I am working with an old friend, yet on my reading project I am working with a new friend I have made this present year. My elder brother once told me, "Being fair and just to others will help you in the long run some how," and now since then I have been following his remark.

Secondly, I am caring of my family. I am the kind of thoughtful person, who would send flowers and get well cards to every single person in a hospital if I could. I am helpful to my mom, dad, and brother in there times of need. Helping my mom clean and cook has become custom for me. I usually help my mom cook if she comes home late; I also help her clean around the house if I am finished with my homework. On a regular basis, I am helping my dad repair things around the house. I usually help him outside with the plants or inside painting. I also help my brother by getting him things he needs at the time, from a glass of water to a battery. When I help people it shows that I care for them very much and I help my family a great deal. When my mom told me, "You are the most caring child she knows," my face lit up with joy.

Lastly, I am very responsible. Bees are to honey as I am to responsibility. I do many things to show that I am responsible. As soon as I come home from school I start my all homework, so I can give it in on time. I study for as long as I can in the night to keep up my straight A's I have had since first grade. I accomplish all my house chores for the week early so I have enough time to do other things. I also balance two extracurricular, dance and national junior honor society, activities with school. I am also very organized and mature. I keep myself organized my using a daily planner and I am mature because I can handle emergency situations properly. My second grade teacher once told me, "I would like to have a whole class filled with you because you are a very responsible and smart student."

Using character counts traits all throughout my life has been easy. Fairness, caring, and responsibility are only some character counts traits I have practiced in my life. Going to school is a very easy task for me and so is using simple character counts traits.

**Panida Charnvitayapong
Hidden Oaks Middle School**

Panida Charnvitayapong
Hidden Oaks Middle School

Character is what you are; it's how you present yourself to the world around you. These are some of the character traits that I have applied in my life.

First of all, many people have seen me as a caring person. To be caring, it means to be concerned of others whenever in need. This character pillar has taught me to think of others before myself. I can remember one time in school, I was standing in line waiting to buy my lunch, and one girl that I know asks me if she could borrow some money because she didn't have any money in her account. I was kind enough by just giving her some money to buy her lunch, even though I had the choice to say no. Although, I never got any money back, I thought to myself, at least it was only a couple of dollars. When I'm at home, I see my mom standing in the kitchen cooking dinner; and I would ask her, "Mom do you need any help with anything?" Most of the time she would respond no, but sometimes yes and I would always help her out with dishes, prepping, cooking some of the food, and etc. She would always say thank you to me, which made me feel good knowing that she appreciates my help. Whenever I'd go shopping with my mom, she would always open the door for others before herself, this inspired me to do the same. Some people appreciate what you've done for them, even though it's not much. The way I see it, it's the thought that counts. This pillar is very crucial because it's a trait that people like to see in others.

In addition, being respectful is also one of the other character traits that people see me as. To be respectful, it means to show honor or esteem for others. There's a saying, "To earn respect is to give respect." I believe in this phrase and follow it everyday. I always show my regards to my elders, teachers, and my peers. In class, I use kind words, I pay attention, I ask questions, and I respond when called upon. By doing this, it shows the teachers that want to learn, and that I appreciate them teaching me. I have to admit, there are some teachers that are not so nice, but I still show approbation to them. When it comes to my friends, I just love hanging out with them. Even though my friends could get mean sometimes, I'm still nice to them. When I'm at home, I always show respect to my parents, but sometimes I get frustrated with things, and I end up giving my parents a hard time. I've been getting better though, with controlling myself, and ignoring things that get on my nerves. Whenever my family and I go out and have fun, a lot of times people smile at me, I would just smile back. As you can see, not everybody is perfect when it comes to being respectful, but it's the fact that people actually try their best to do the right thing. I know that I'm not perfect, but I try my very best everyday. Being respectful is very significant as well because it tells people that you can treat others the way you'd like to be treated.

As a final point, another character trait I'd say describes me is trustworthiness. To be trustworthy means to be reliable and dependable. You have to believe and trust yourself that you can do what's right. I remember the times when we do group projects in school. People always depend on each other to do their job and get it done. As for me, I always do what I need to do, even if it's midnight I still do my best to get it done. Everyone has a choice to do what they want, but I chose to do what's right because I knew people were relying on me. I made a commitment to myself and my group, and it would've been horrendous of me to let them down. I spent my time to do what my group trusted me to do. As for my family, they impose me to make the right choices in life, so that I don't go downhill in whatever I do. In the community, it's difficult to know who to trust nowadays; but as long as they know who and how you are, and you know them, you'll be fine. This pillar has really made a role in my life because if someone depends on me to do something; I will do what is expected of me. This characteristic describes me as well because I am the kind of person that anybody can confide on.

In conclusion, these character traits that I have applied to myself is very important to me. I never really knew the meaning of these pillars when I was younger, but now I'm really starting to understand it. All of the character counts pillars have made a huge role in my life, and I want to be a good role model for myself in the future. These traits will continue to strive me to be a better person, and will help me to succeed towards everything I do in the future. Hopefully, these pillars will make a difference for others as well.

Maria Gonzalez
Indiantown Middle School

Maria Gonzalez
Indiantown Middle School

"It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not." This quote is by Andre Gide and applies to me very well because I'd rather have people hate me for the person I am than for them to love me for being someone that is fake. For example, I'd rather have people hate me because I don't want to do drugs than for them to love me for doing drugs. Building a good foundation that will help me be strong is not easy, but using the six pillars of character as a reference is very helpful. Respect, trustworthiness, and citizenship are the pillars that play the most important role in the decisions I make everyday.

Being respectful is essential to me because when I show respect to others then they will show respect to me. First of all, the result that I have seen from showing respect to teachers is that then they will show that they care. For example, a fellow student went to a teacher for advice but the teacher didn't listen because that student was disrespectful in class by constantly talking and interrupting the teacher. I, personally, show respect by paying attention to what people are saying, striving to fulfill my parents' wishes, and respecting authority figures by obeying the rules and laws in my community. By demonstrating respect in my day to day life, I feel that the people around me respect me in the same way I respect them.

Do what you say you'll do so people will have faith in you and trust you. Every day I make good decisions by not getting involved in things that I know are wrong, such as drugs and gossip, even when faced with social pressures, standing up for my beliefs about what is right and what is wrong, and showing loyalty by supporting my friends, community, and country. This type of support builds a foundation of trust with my peers, parents and teachers and shows them that they can rely on me. Furthermore, I feel that trust should be earned and not just given out too easily.

Do you know whether all students contribute in helping make their schools and communities better places? Getting involved in community activities like in church by helping younger children prepare for Communion, lending a helping hand to my elderly neighbors by cleaning their houses, and giving other assistance where needed are all acts of a good citizen. Another factor of being a good citizen that I feel strongly about is protecting the environment and getting others involved in recycling and neighborhood clean ups. By exhibiting good citizenship, I can make my community a better place.

Because I am a leader in my school, it is vital to exhibit trustworthiness, respect and citizenship due to the fact that I am a role model for younger students. When I leave Indiantown Middle School for South Fork high School, my hope for the younger students is for them to show that they can also be role models for the younger students as I was and lead by example, which I hope I have achieved. Thoreau once said, "Live your beliefs and you can turn the world around." I believe that having the Character Counts pillars in my life has placed me on the correct path, provided me with the will to make the right decisions and enabled me to set out in the right direction.

**Christian McKnight
Indiantown Middle School**

Christian McKnight
Indiantown Middle School

"It is not always the same thing to be a good man and a good citizen", that is what the famous writer Aristotle said in his time. I believe that to be a good citizen you need to be responsible, respectful, and trustworthy. These are the three things that have played a critical part of my life to becoming a benevolent citizen.

To be trustworthy is one of the key factors to being a good citizen. Being trustworthy is playing a superior role in life as time goes by. Today trust can lead to not only the quantity, but the quality of the friends you have. Popularity may gain you friends, but not get you a job! Most people who are not trusted are disliked, frowned upon, and not successful in life!

If you want to succeed in life, it is mandatory that you be respectful to the people around you. Today respect is becoming the minority of all the character counts pillars. The present generation is becoming more and more disrespectful. The elders and adults of the world look down on them and wonder how their children could have gotten so contaminated with this horrendous disease. It eats away at us, leaving us dry and bitter. To make friends or do anything for that matter you must have respect for others, not just for adults, but for your boss, coworkers, peers, and juveniles. You also have to remember that to get respect you have to not only give it, but you have to earn it as well. You can't just expect a person to give you respect right off the bat, you have to earn it.

Being responsible is something you learn when you are a child. Your parents teach it to you throughout our life, and you, as you get older, should become more responsible. Responsibility is a prominent obstacle in life because it requires a lot of perseverance and discipline. Being responsible is used in day to day life. It is needed at jobs, in school, at home, and every where else on earth. No matter if you go to a different continent or a different universe, responsibility follows you wherever you go. Without responsibility, you aren't dependable or worthy. Without responsibility, the world would be left in chaos.

The six pillars of Character Counts keeps the world in order. The most important pillars that play the most important role in life are trustworthiness, responsibility, and respect. To be successful in life, it is mandatory that you have these traits.

Richard Simonson
Murray Middle School

Richard Simonson
Murray Middle School

The impact I have made in the lives of others is through community service in my roles as executive chair member in the Parent Teacher Student Association, chairman in the Teen Advisory Board for Martin County, a voting voice in the Martin County Department of Parks and Recreation, Boy Scouts, a volunteer at my sister's school (Sea Wind Elementary), and the People to People Ambassador Program.

As a student member of the Murray Middle School Parent Teacher Student Association executive board, I dedicate my time toward responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, and citizenship. People depend on me to be at every meeting and to preserve values and community culture in my school. In the PTSA, people trust in me to make the right decision for my school and my community. Being on this executive, board I care a lot about the students and the teachers of this school and make sure every body gets a fair chance of representation at our meetings. Parent Teacher Student Association also highlights citizenship in my life because I can maintain a quality of life in my community and at my school.

The Teen Advisory Board is one of my favorite boards because it teaches me responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, and citizenship, and in the relay for life we raise money for cancer awareness and research. On the Teen Advisory Board, I represent the importance of citizenship by trying to maintain a balanced, quality life in the community for teens. Responsibility is important at TAB because every teenager in Martin County is counting on me and all the members on the advisory board. As my role on the Teen Advisory Board many people trust in me to be at all of the meetings and to make fair choices. One of the reasons I joined this board is because I care about all the teenagers that can't get out on a weekend. I am involved in planning events and activities for them as well as planning fundraisers for cancer research and for the children's home society of Florida.

I represent the Teen Advisory Board on the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. I have the role of responsibility and trustworthiness because I have a voting voice on the Martin County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. Every Martin County resident relies on my decision. My citizenship is highlighted by having a voting voice and being responsible to the citizens of Martin County.

My sister and I have been living in a single parent home all of our lives and my sister does not have a positive male role model. So I've tried my whole life to be a positive male role model for my sister. I've volunteered at every one of my sister's Girl Scout events and volunteer at my sister's school so I know my sister can trust me. She knows I will take responsibility for her and good care of her.

Boy Scouts of America has also highlighted my responsibility, trustworthiness and caring of my fellow citizens by annual coat drives, food drives, and beach cleanups. Boy Scouts of America highlighted my responsibility and independence from camping and learning how to trust other people and how to take responsibility of myself.

Finally, I am in the Dwight D. Eisenhower's People to People Ambassador Program. I gained global understanding and citizenship from the People to People Program as I promoted world peace through the understanding between the citizens of the world. I was able to travel the world as a Student Ambassador and was able to observe the values and cultures of others by being a global citizen and positively representing the values and culture of the United States.

Aside from these many opportunities to serve in my community, I also play two instruments in my school band and enjoy membership in many after- school clubs.

All in all, I have been blessed to have the opportunity to make a difference in my life and the lives of those around me. I am honored to have been nominated for this prestigious award and hope this essay gives some insight into my amazing life as a thirteen year- old young man in Martin County, Florida.

**Courtland Thomas
Murray Middle school**

Courtland Thomas
Murray Middle School

Each of the six Character Counts traits has been apart of my life. Since I can remember, we have been introduced to them, ever since my first year at SeaWind Elementary. We would be honored for one of the good characteristic traits via sitting on the cafeteria's stage. Nowadays, it doesn't sound any more prestigious than receiving a pencil for something we've accomplished. But back then, it was as if we were royalty, being honored that we had brought "Character Counts" into our lives. As we grew older, so did our awards. Each year, at each semester, several students would be honored, and one of the common awards was the Citizenship Award. Not to sound braggish, but I received one of the blue ribbons, which often became bookmarks, from third grade until into the fifth grade, where it had ended.

The past three years in middle school, we were taught to be trustworthy to friends in need; we learned to not only respect elders, but ourselves as well; we experimented with responsibility, either getting too little or too much; sought and complained for fairness, trying to not favor anyone or anything more than enough; learned to be caring towards others; and show good citizenship to our community and school. All of these seem like the normal school rules, but Murray Middle had them on their mind since I first started two years ago. Of course, the awards weren't the simple ones we received back in elementary school, but it wasn't until this year that I learned that the award isn't what makes it worthwhile. Previous years, most people just wanted something for their good deed, and I didn't know there was any other way to accomplish a good deed without receiving something in return.

This year, I realized that awards can come in other, surprising ways: karma is an excellent example, because what goes around comes around. Not necessary that minute, that hour, that day, that moment in time. And there's always the self-sense of doing something for another person or group of people that should make someone feel accomplished, because I certainly do. Good deeds aren't supposed to be recognized, no matter how extraordinary they are. To most people, it sounds like common sense, but it wasn't until this year, only my thirteenth year on this earth, did it make sense to me. No one told me, explained to me—I figured it out on my own. To me, that's an accomplishment in itself.

But, to my surprise, Murray decided to offer a little recognition ceremony for those being recognized on doing good deeds. At first, I thought it had nothing to do with Character Counts, but then I figured out that both have the same good traits—being good! People who are "caught" doing a good deed, whether it's showing responsibility or trustworthiness or anything good-related, would get their name submitted via whoever "caught" that person to the Guidance Office. In return for the good deed, said person would be given a leaf to put on the Tree of Compassion during their lunch, in front of the rest of their grade. It sounds a little iffy, but I was shocked to hear that my name was called. Thanks to Mrs. Forbes, my name was one of the firsts on the tree. By now, the tree has at least thirty leaves (yes, I counted), and I'm proud to say some of them are indeed my friends.

But the school-functioned lessons aren't the only ways I've been involved with Character Counts.

At home, my mother often complains that I show *too* much trustworthiness via wanting to baby sit my eighteen month old sister. I'm willing to do it because we, my sister and I, have nonstop fun together. If I'm having a bad day, seeing her smile can flip it upside down. Even if it's for a brief second before she realizes her mama has "left her" to use the bathroom or to grab a quick drink, she still makes my life more enjoyable than it already is. Whenever I promise to baby sit, though sometimes it means skipping out on movie night with my friends, I stick it through. A promise is a promise, no matter if its years after the promise were made.

Just last month, a large group of my close friends (we refer to ourselves as a 'pack' since we have most of our classes together and pretty much try to keep a twenty-four/seven communication with one another at all times) was going to the big Firefighters Halloween Haunted House. It was the night before Halloween, everyone was wearing their costumes, and I mean *everybody* was going to be there. But my mom, who is trying to fight her way through college, had homework for one of her classes and needed time to finish up the last bit of it. She estimated the time and it turned out that I would miss over half the fun, meaning I would get there extremely late. That is, if I stayed and baby sat.

Which I did. Homework versus hanging out with friends; even I know the answer to that. However, my mom's great friend, who is technically one of my friends just not in my age group, decided to stop by. She witnessed the situation and practically kidnapped me, my brother, and my little sister and took us to hang out everywhere. She bought me whatever I wanted, but I didn't really want anything. Chandler, my brother, didn't hesitate as much because a simple pen could entertain him. And my sister was just in shock of this new lady. The four of us stayed out longer than I would have if I had went out with my friends, and we had probably as twice as fun as I would have had. We did a lot of random things, and by the time we got home, my mom was already dressed and ready to join the pack. I swear, I'll never forget the night before the previous Halloween, where I could have went home at eight with a few nightmares from the haunted house, but instead, hung out with my entertaining family until it was barely past midnight.

In my opinion, if I hadn't had the same level of responsibility and caring as I had at the moment, I would have missed out on some great fun and maybe even gotten my mom kicked out of her advanced college class. To summon up all my thoughts, I'd like to end by saying the Character Counts traits have, are, and will always be in my life: Caring, citizenship, fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

Juan Colmenares
Stuart Middle School

Juan Colmenares
Stuart Middle School

From my earliest days people have always described me as being very respectful and responsible. These character traits were rooted in me by my mother and grand mother. In December 2002, when I emigrated from Villapinzon, Colombia, to my stepfather's home in the United States, I carried little else with me. I did not even speak English. As it turned out, these two pillars of character enabled me to transition successfully to a new life in Jensen Beach, Florida and helped me achieve a 4.0 grade point average at Stuart Middle School.

To begin with, respecting others is a good way to get it back. My stepfather does not speak Spanish. So, at first, I could not communicate with him verbally. But I was always respectful towards him. To be respectful is to feel or show deferential regard, and he could see it. For example, when he would take us out to eat at a restaurant I would always say "gracias." When he would come up with an idea, even if I did not agree with it, I would respect his good intentions. Sometimes I would add my own suggestions and he would agree with them. For his part, my stepfather started to help me with my homework, especially with English.

I always try to show the same respect towards my teachers. While other kids often interrupt the teacher, I raise my hand and wait to be recognized. I also try to help my teachers in any way possible, such as by holding open a door or handing out graded papers and work books. If a teacher asks me to do something I do it. One day recently, my best friend complimented my pencil sketches out loud before my teacher, Ms. Searcy. Ms. Searcy then asked me if I could draw a character from a show called "Naruto." That night I drew her a picture of Hinata.

Responsibility to me means a duty and obligation to do what I have to do in a timely fashion. That is why I always write my class work/home work, future test dates and special projects on my planner so I will never forget. After I graduate from high school, I plan to study architecture and cartoon animation in college. Becoming a pencil artist is also a strong possibility. I plan to enroll in the "Academy of Arts University" in San Francisco. I know that it will be difficult to get into this Academy so it is crucial for me to sustain a 4.0 grade average every semester, if possible.

I also assume a lot of responsibility at home. Most of the time, I clean the tables and help my mother dry the silverware and glasses after they come out of the dishwasher. Almost every weekend I also vacuum and dust my mom's room and my step-dad's study. I also pick up all the toys of my two-year old baby sister.

To conclude, being respectful towards others and a responsible individual has helped me achieve quite a lot in a short time. It has also made me much more confident than I was in December 2002.

**Brendan O'Connor
Stuart Middle School**

Brendan O'Connor
Stuart Middle School

Hi Character Counts, my name is Brendan O'Connor, and I got nominated for the John Kordick Youth Character award. At first, I thought I was in trouble when I got called up to the office, but I later found out that the faculty and staff members at Stuart Middle School nominated me for this great award that Character Counts presents. They nominated me for all of the six pillars of character, but I certainly excel at two of them- Responsibility and Citizenship.

My first pillar that I would like to write about would be Responsibility. This pillar is incredibly important to me because without it I wouldn't be on time to certain events (like school or sporting events). I would also forget about things that are due or are supposed to be done – just like this essay. I am President of Builder's Club this year, and I was also President two years ago in my 6th grade year. Responsibility is a big key in keeping the meetings organized and being able to run it in an efficient manner. I am also involved with a travel soccer team, and a travel baseball team. Responsibility plays a huge role there because I have to know when my games are, and I have to show up on time. If I don't show up for my soccer games, that depletes the substitutions for the people who are tired or hurt. I also have to have the responsibility to play my position because if I don't, then it could blow an entire play. In baseball, it is just as important because you have to play with at least 9 players, and if I don't show up the team might only have 8 players and we would forfeit and lose. I am also a National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) member and officer. My official position in NJHS is Sergeant-at-Arms and if I am not there Mrs. Flood, the incredible leader of NJHS, would have to handle the meeting and get everybody quiet by herself.

If anything I would have to say that school is the most important thing to have the most responsibility in. In school I have to turn in my homework on time and sometimes I get homework in all 8 periods (except lunch). This year I have to deal with blocked period too, which is two periods for one class, and I might even get more homework than usual. I am also in both Symphonic and Jazz Bands and I play lead (1st chair) saxophone in both. In band I have to be responsible because if I don't show up for an event like a concert or parade it could mess up the show, and I would also get a zero in the grade book which would hurt my grade significantly.

At my house I also have to be responsible because I have two dogs, my own bedroom, and my own bathroom. My sister and I are responsible for feeding and giving the dogs water when they run out. We also have to take them on walks and play with them outside so they can get their exercise and be healthy. I also have to be responsible to keep my bedroom and bathroom clean just in case I have friends or family over. I have to handle all of these important tasks while keeping my record as a straight "A" student. Responsibility is a huge pillar for me and without it, everything would just fall apart.

If I had to choose another pillar that I excel at and would like to write about, it would have to be citizenship. Citizenship, for me, deals more with the community than anything else. As you already know, I am an NJHS member and officer, but in order to stay in NJHS you need to do volunteer work to get hours. If you are just a member, you need to get 20 hours of volunteer work by the end of the year to be recognized. But since I am an officer, I need to get 40 hours of volunteer work to get recognized by the end of the year. Well, this is where citizenship comes into play in my community. To get volunteer hours you have to get involved with a lot of groups that give you hours for working with the community.

I am in the Environmental Studies Centers volunteer group to help work in and raise money for the environment. Sometimes we help clean up the community (like the beach and the river

banks) and clean it from pollution and garbage. Other times, we will help to raise money by giving a tour of the ESC, bake sales, book sales, and much more. All the time, we are making our community and the environment a better place to live, while we get volunteer hours for helping out. I also volunteer at my school during the summer which as you know is Stuart Middle School, to help out the teachers and the staff to get ready for another productive school year. Usually, I take textbooks and workbooks to all of the classrooms to make sure that all of the kids in the class would be able to have them. Sometimes I shred papers from teachers, throw unwanted things into the school dumpster, or I might even be asked to do arts and crafts for the teachers' rooms. Volunteering at school is fun too because you get to meet the teachers and sometimes the staff would order pizza from Luna's. The good thing is that I am still getting volunteer hours for NJHS while I show my citizenship to the school.

I also recently volunteered at Jensen Beach Elementary School because they wanted help for their Halloween dance that they were holding. I helped by running a game called "Toss a Penny" in which the kids had to throw a penny into a bucket for a prize. It wasn't that hard, but somehow the kids kept missing the bucket. I also made lemonade and helped carry heavy things so that the ladies did not need to. I didn't get volunteer hours for this, but it was fun doing it anyways, especially watching the little kids dance. Citizenship is important to me and my community and it is one of my favorite pillars.

In conclusion, the six pillars of character have definitely played a role in my life and they are all very important to me. Citizenship and Responsibility are just the things that I can do best at, though I am good at all of them. Character Counts, you are doing a great job and I want you to keep doing it because you are changing kids' lives every day with this award that you present. I would incredibly appreciate if you picked me for the John Kordick's Youth Character award because it would only help me earn my doctor's degree! Thank You!

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