

2009 Heart of Broomfield winners: Giving is par for course for Ferraro



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Like most fathers, Mike Ferraro marvels at his daughter. But Melanie Ferraro's latest endeavor has taken even his breath away.

The 16-year-old is aiding the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's attempt to stamp out malaria in Africa by 2015. Ferraro's role is helping ELCA raise funds by engaging school children across Colorado. The task fits the outgoing teen like a glove.

And the response she has received to her 20-minute presentations has floored her father. "She given the presentation to about 600 high school students and 1,200 middle school students," Mike Ferraro said. "And they have pledged to raise \$83,000 by May of 2010."

Impressive as the Heart of Broomfield Youth Award winner's work on malaria is, it is just par for the course for a young lady defined by donating her time.

In addition to maintaining a 4.5 grade point average, in anticipation of being an international affairs major at the University of Colorado, the teen nearly squeezes 48 hours into 24. She can be found doing almost anything from helping set up Kohl Elementary School's carnival to being a founding member of Broomfield High School's "Friends of Rachel," a club that helps students feel welcome at the school.

And Ferraro isn't motivated by padding her already-impressive resume. "She would do all this if it didn't count toward anything," Broomfield High School principal Ginger Ramsey said. "She is this involved because she loves people."

The interest in other people is not strictly limited to volunteer opportunities.

Lori Doerr's high-school-aged sons -- Steve and Dan -- were not thrilled about moving from Minnesota to Broomfield a year ago. Even after the first day of school, things looked like they were going to be tough, with the boys struggling to fit in. Then that weekend, Ferraro showed up and became their liaison with the town's teens. She was the catalyst for the boys making friends at the school. "My boys call Melanie their sister now," Doerr said.

Ferraro became enamored with helping people when she was in eighth grade and traveled to Juarez, Mexico, to help build a house for a family in need. The experience showed her how donating just a little time can change someone's life.

But her zest for helping others goes further back than that. When she thinks about it, volunteering has always been a part of her life. "My parents have always been involved," she said. "They were my models."