



**2022 Recipient ~ Samantha Milewicz
Byram Hills High School, Class of 2023**

While growing up, I had an intense fear of needles that made immunizations and lab testing quite the challenge. Yet on my sixteenth birthday, I decided that would change. After passing my permit test, my mom drove us to our local blood donation center. I found myself with my arm being wiped down with alcohol, but this time, I was calm and overcome with a sense of adrenaline. Rather than turning away, I watched as the nurse smoothly inserted the needle, and the blood began to flow. With greater anticipation I awaited the arrival of my donor card more than that of my permit. Weeks later, I received an email that my blood had made it all the way to Montefiore St. Luke's in Newburgh. I now donate as often as possible.

Eliminating my trepidation of needles has only reinforced the values my parents instilled at a young age, that I should not let my own foolish fears prevent me from helping others.

This idea has become a part of all aspects of my life. I have been able to combine my interests with my passion for community service. For as long as I can recall, I have taken pictures everywhere I go, whether it be while sitting in my stroller as I looked through the pink and green rubber camera with two viewfinders or using the digital camera hanging around my neck through which I see the world today. As my skills have developed, I have turned this casual hobby into an avocation. Through interning with The Inside Press magazines of Armonk, Chappaqua & Millwood, and Pleasantville & Briarcliff Manor, I have captured community events, such as the 5K Run for Love fundraiser, the Armonk Outdoor Art Show, and the dedication of The New Castle Holocaust Memorial, which had President Bill Clinton as a guest speaker. Photographing occasions like these has allowed me to educate the community about events through my photography, providing a visual aid to increase excitement about such gatherings.

Another passion of mine is science, specifically medicine. At my school, Byram Hills High School, I am a part of the Authentic Science Research program, a three-year elective in which students pick a topic, find a mentor in their field, and conduct an independently designed study. Due to my interest in neuroscience as well as the grave impact on today's population, I am researching traumatic brain injuries. Aided by my mentor, Dr. Charles S. Cox at McGovern Medical School UTHealth Science Center at Houston, this summer I will be utilizing a novel in vitro model of the blood-brain barrier (BBB) to further explore such disturbances caused by traumatic brain injuries. More

specifically, I hope to identify a therapeutic target, MMP-9. Ultimately, the results of my study may be used to help to limit TBI's detrimental effects caused by increased BBB permeability.

I am also president of the eNable Club at my school, which 3D prints assistive devices for children with motor disabilities, such as cerebral palsy. Through Onshape, an online CAD system, we work collaboratively to brainstorm, compose, and then build prototypes, making continuous adjustments accordingly. Additionally, certain projects may entail using the laser cutter, such as bringing to reality the keyboard cover we designed in 2020. We have taken on projects from Makers Making Change, whose goal is to achieve economic and social inclusiveness for all people with challenges by connecting makers to those who need assistive devices, as well as individuals at Blythedale Children's Hospital and Cerebral Palsy of Westchester.

With my interest in healthcare I have also been able to make a direct impact in my community. I am a member of Northern Westchester Hospital's President's Junior Leadership Council (PJLC), made up of fifty-six students from eight schools across Northern Westchester. Within the council, I was also selected as one of six individuals to be a member of the Advisory Board, which works with the program managers as leaders among leaders to organize, provide feedback, and lead the council. As a group, we meet twice a month. Once to hear from a speaker within the hospital, and the second to work on our healthcare campaign. Each year, we select an issue that we believe affects our peers and work to bring awareness to it. This year, our campaign is called Cultivate Community and works to address loneliness in teens brought on by the pandemic. We encourage not only teens but everyone in the community to re-engage and reconnect with those around us to enhance our sense of unity. Through our upcoming participation in the Northwell Walk and our own event in the Team Member Wellness Garden, we invite teens of the community to come together to get hands-on experience gardening, meet new friends, and enjoy some relaxing time outdoors. Additionally, all produce grown in the garden is given to the most at-risk patients upon discharge from the hospital to address food insecurities. Another event we will participate in is the Northwell Walk. Being a part of PJLC has not only opened up a door to more volunteer opportunities but also has allowed me to meet other people and learn from different perspectives, characteristics necessary for improving our community.

Finally, I am also a volunteer firefighter and EMT at the Armonk Fire Department. To receive these certifications, I have put in over 310 hours of training in addition to the time I spend working to further improve at my home department. I make every effort to respond to as many calls as I can, responding at 22:55 when my curfew ends at 23:00. Additionally, prior to certification, I rode with the chiefs as often as possible to assist in whatever capacity they needed, whether it be grabbing supplies from the ambulance, assisting in patient lifting and moving, or collecting patient information. While my role on these sorts of calls was limited, small actions like these can help assuage the feelings of patients who are at their worst by allowing the EMT to focus solely on the well-being of the patient. Additionally, I recently was on scene for my first structure fire, and while my role

in this was limited as well due to my status as a junior member (under 18), I was able to help out by retrieving equipment from the trucks as well as helping with cleanup. My work with the fire department is the epitome of St. Vincent's belief in ensuring the dignity of human life and excellence in service.

I believe that it is my duty to take an active role in giving back. My passion for completing acts of service is no small thing and something that will follow me throughout my life as I pursue a career in healthcare and research. Through my various volunteer commitments and interests, it is clear that I encapsulate St. Vincent's commitment to the community within my own.