



SCHOOL OF THOUGHT **STUDENT VOICE**

WHAT PAYING IT FORWARD REALLY MEANS

POSTED BY [ANN POSTLEWAITE](#) ON OCTOBER 22, 2015



Jake Gallin, a national honoree in the 2015 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program, is all about giving back. The Prudential program, co-sponsored with NASSP, is the nation's largest youth recognition program based solely on student volunteer service. The program is [accepting applicants who have exhibited extraordinary volunteer service](#) through November 3.

As one of 10 national honorees, he won a \$5,000 cash prize and a \$1,000 cash award as his state's top honoree. And in the true spirit of community, Jake gave it all away.

Maybe you need to learn about Jake and the volunteer activity that earned him this acclaim to understand his selfless act.

The image of a grieving mother reading the children's book *Corduroy* at the graveside of her son killed in the Iraq war would move Jake to action. It was January 2011, and Jake was 8 years old watching "The Oprah Winfrey Show." Oprah's guests that day, first lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, wanted viewers to recognize "Blue Star" and "Gold Star" military families. Jake learned that "Blue Star" signified a family member who is serving in the armed forces, and "Gold Star" signified that a loved one had died defending our nation. Mrs. Obama and Dr. Biden were joined by Teresa Arciola, the mom whose heart-wrenching image weighed heavy in Jake's mind.

While just a third grader at the time, Jake immediately went into action, designing a star decal for cars that he sold in person and on a website he launched, www.starsforcars.org. All proceeds from decal sales go to the United Service Organizations (USO) of Metropolitan New York. To date, more than \$20,000 has been raised. But, Jake is quick to explain, "The project is not about raising money. It's about raising awareness."





His endeavor earned him recognition as the middle level New York state honoree in the Prudential program. In May, he joined with other state honorees to be recognized at a gala in Washington, D.C. During that four-day event, the 10 national honorees were announced. He learned he was a national winner, earning him a \$5,000 cash prize. While the award was meant for Jake personally, he donated it to Volunteer New York!, the organization that nominated him for recognition. He also started a matching gift program through a crowdfunding campaign called “Give 5.” Jake said, “I figured if I could give away \$5,000 then others could potentially give a \$5 match.”

His national honor also earned him the opportunity to designate a \$5,000 grant for a worthy cause, and he chose the USO of Metropolitan New York. He also gave the USO the \$1,000 award he received as the Prudential honoree for New York state.

Perhaps his fourth grade teacher, who routinely gave him the adult version of *TIME* magazine instead of the student version each week, saw this coming. “He told me that one day, I would be featured in ‘*TIME* magazine’s 100 Most Influential People of the Year.’”

Do you know a student like Jake? Encourage your students to complete an [online application](#) by November 3 to be in the running for this year’s competition. Visit www.nassp.org/spirit for more information.

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