

Angora Fire at root of youth's volunteer award

Ashlee Smith, 13, of Sparks and Angela Foremaster, 18, of North Las Vegas have been named Nevada's youth volunteers for 2012 by the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards.

The nationwide program honors young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism.

Ashlee, a seventh-grader at Lou Mendive Middle School, founded a nonprofit organization that has collected and distributed more than 175,000 toys over the past five years for child victims of house fires and natural disasters. When Ashlee was 5, her family's home burned down. Everything they owned was destroyed, including Ashlee's special toy – a stuffed horse.

A few years later, her father, a firefighter, was battling the Angora Fire.

"He sent us pictures of destroyed houses and all included burned toys in the yards," Ashlee said in a statement. "I knew right away how the kids were feeling, and I knew I had to help."

That same day, Ashlee began calling television and radio stations, newspapers and local businesses to ask for help. Toy donations came flooding in. She spent her entire summer vacation organizing toys, posting flyers and appealing for more donations. With additional support from toy companies, Ashlee was able to fill a whole semi-truck trailer with toys, which she delivered to the children affected by the South Lake Tahoe fire. Since that initial fire, Ashlee's organization, Ashlee's Toy Closet, has continued its quest to make sure that no child is left without the comfort of a toy.

Last year, she provided toys for children devastated by the

tornado in Joplin, Mo. Ashlee has also begun supplying Christmas and birthday presents for local needy children who otherwise would go without.

Angela, a senior at Legacy High School, collected small gifts to fill 250 Christmas stockings for foster children and homeless teens in the greater Las Vegas area.

As state honorees, Ashlee and Angela each will receive \$1,000, an engraved silver medallion, and an all-expense-paid trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the top two honorees from each of the other states and the District of Columbia for several days of national recognition events. Ten of them will be named America's top youth volunteers for 2012 at that time.