

# Cov. program lauded nationally

## S.A.V.E. group returns from national convention with award

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COVENTRY — Coventry Schools and its students may be small in the grand scheme of the nation, but they actually made a big impression at a national convention held earlier this month.

Both the school department as a whole and an individual student from town came back from the convention with a national award.

Students from the S.A.V.E [Students Against Vandalism Everywhere] program in town went to the Youth Crime Watch Convention in Orlando, Florida earlier this month to represent the town and according to Charles Blanchette, one of the advisors of the program, they came back victors.

Coventry Public Schools earned the Educational Institute of the Year award and Emily Gamage, an eighth grade student at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry,

earned the Youth of the Year award at the convention.

Coventry School Superintendent Kenneth DiPietro said he couldn't be prouder.

"We are extremely proud of the students in the program for receiving this award," he said. "The fact that S.A.V.E. is created by students shows the quality of the students; that they are working with the police department shows that our community works together.

"For a middle school that bears the name Alan Shawn Feinstein, who advocates so strongly for making the community a better place, I think it is very appropriate that they should receive this award," he said.

Blanchette said the students go to the convention each year in hopes of earning some titles, but actually just look forward to being a part of the festivities. At the convention, he said, the students get to listen to inspiring speakers, interact with students from around the country and

the world and discuss various topics associated with their cause, to stop vandalism and bullying.

According to Blanchette, many of the students in the school's S.A.V.E. program are truly committed to the cause, but this year, he said he felt that Gamage "went above and beyond that" and therefore, he nominated her for the school-wide award.

Blanchette said Gamage made contact with a group of students from a school in Florida at the convention who were interested in creating a program similar to the one that has taken off locally. Blanchette said Gamage created a training video for the students and mentored them in their new venture.

He said that was just one example of Gamage's commitment to the cause. In fact, he said, she is constantly doing things to help the town's program grow even on her own time as well as during program meetings.

He said he has also seen a marked

improvement in her own personal skills as a public speaker and as a communicator and spokesperson for the cause since she joined the group last year.

According to Gamage, it has become a real passion for her.

"I really enjoy the whole thing so none of it ever really seemed like work to me and maybe that is why I do so much with it, but its okay because I like to do it," she said. "I have also gotten so much out of being a part of this group. I have made so many new friends and I used to be a terrible public speaker, but after I presented something to this group and they really showed an interest in my idea it really helped with my self confidence and now I have no problem talking in front of groups and people that are older than I am like I used to."

Gamage said she has brought her award home with her, but the district-wide award, Blanchette said, will be displayed at the school.



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Students from the S.A.V.E [Students Against Vandalism Everywhere] program came back from the Youth Crime Watch Convention Educational Institute of the Year award winners. Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry student Emily Gamage (front) also received special recognition as Youth of the Year.