

Community service is no longer a means to an end to Marlie Tolleson.

The New Hope High School junior used to look at doing community service as a way to meet her Beta Club requirement.

But Tolleson's thinking changed last year after working on an assignment – "20Time" -- in Rachel Robertson's English class. The lesson asked students to devote 20% of their week to things that benefited others.

The timing of the assignment hit home with Tolleson because her father, Randy, was recovering from heart surgery at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Columbus. As part of her classwork, Tolleson decided to make blankets for patients on the fourth floor of the hospital.

"After I left I wanted to give more because I felt bad that I didn't give everybody one," Tolleson said. "My thinking changed because I saw the people I served and how they were blessed by me and how it made me feel."

That thinking continues to motivate Tolleson and is one of the reasons she will represent New Hope High as its Carson Scholar for 2023-24 and will compete in the Carson Scholarship competition. The Carson Scholars Program is for students in fourth through 11th grade. To be eligible, a student must be nominated by a current educator, have a Grade-Point Average (GPA) of 3.75 or higher and be involved with community service. Students recognized receive a \$1,000 college scholarship.

Tolleson admits she didn't know anything about the Carson Scholarship competition before her mother, Shannon, and New Hope High counselor Jenny Box told her about it, but she seems like an ideal student to represent New Hope High, at least based on her definition of a scholar.

“A scholar is someone who excels not only in academics but everything they do,” said Tolleson, who has a 4.0 GPA and is a member of the school’s cheerleading team.

Tolleson takes a lot of pride in being a scholar and giving her best in everything she does, but she doesn’t like to brag about it, especially when it comes to the work she does at her church, Mt. Vernon, or her community service. Instead, she prefers to do as much as she can as often as possible, just like she did when she stayed at the Salvation Army a little longer to make sure all of the Christmas presents were wrapped.

Robertson said Tolleson is always willing to help, whether it means explaining a difficult concept or assisting with peer writing in her English classes, being part of a praise or outreach team or the children’s ministry at Mt. Vernon or as a member of the school’s cheerleading team, student council, Beta Club and Take One Show Choir.”

“Marlie’s heart for people is displayed in every context in which she resides,” Robertson said. “There have been many days I have opened my MacBook to find sticky notes Marlie left for me. She never fails to put a smile on my face.”

Elizabeth Malone, a science teacher at New Hope High, hasn’t had Tolleson in class yet, but she has watched her grow up because she went to New Hope High with Randy Tolleson and has known Randy and Shannon, who teaches at New Hope Elementary School, for years.

“Marlie has the kindest heart I have ever seen. She always has a smile on her face, which shows the true joy in her heart. She loves Jesus and shows His love for others in her daily life,” Malone said. “She has always had the sweetest demeanor, even in cheer practice when things

would get rough and others would have a bad attitude, she would always try to be as positive as possible and lift others up. She definitely has a servant's heart and will always give her very best to everything she tries. I am so proud of her!"

New Hope High math teacher Lindsay Miller echoed Malone's feelings about Tolleson.

"Marlie's smile and positive attitude will light up any room she enters," Miller said. "She is an excellent student. She is a kind person who observes the needs of others. She has a servant's heart."

Tolleson hopes her willingness to serve others – even if it is only one person – causes a "chain reaction" and motivates individuals to pay it forward and do the same. She said she truly enjoys working for others and seeing them happy because it makes her happy.

"I don't want to be recognized as the one who won \$1,000 for community service because then people are going to think they just have to do community service to win this much money," Tolleson said. "I don't want to be recognized for the money. I want to be recognized for making somebody happy or for serving somebody."

School nominations for the Carson Scholarship competition close Dec. 15, 2023. All applications close Jan. 12, 2024. Winners will be announced in March 2024.