

Washington's Top Two Youth Volunteers Selected in 12th Annual National Awards Program

Dallas Jessup, 15, of Vancouver and Alexander Jonlin, 13, of Seattle today were named Washington State's top two youth volunteers for 2007 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, a nationwide program honoring young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism. The awards program, now in its 12th year, is conducted by Prudential Financial in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP).

Dallas was nominated by St. Mary's Academy in Portland, Ore., and Alexander was nominated by Washington Middle School in Seattle. As State Honorees, 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 – one middle level and one high school youth – 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 2007 at that time.

Dallas, a sophomore at St. Mary's Academy, co-wrote and starred in a 45-minute film entitled "Just Yell Fire," to teach teen girls how to fight off attackers. She got the idea after seeing the abduction of a Florida girl on television, who was later killed. That tragedy made Dallas, who has a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, realize that not every girl knows how to defend herself. "I found there is almost no information for teen girls to get away from bad situations," she said. "All self-defense techniques either involve years of martial arts or they are designed for adults."

Dallas enlisted the help of her martial arts coach to develop some simple self-defense techniques. "We came up with eye gouges, biting, ear pulling, groin slapping and a few other easy-to-do strategies that a 100-pound girl could use to get away from a 250-pound attacker," she explained. She decided the best way to communicate these strategies would be to make a video. She drafted a script with a friend and a script-writing teacher at a local college, who contacted a director. The project then snowballed into a major production

with a professional crew and a 100-member cast including actors from the television show "Lost."

With donated locations, props, meals and makeup, the film took five days to shoot and debuted soon after at www.justyellfire.com. More than 14,000 people downloaded the video during the first 20 days, and requests for the DVD version have come in from more than 38 states. "The ultimate impact I hope for is that predators will be put out of business, and women all over the world can go anywhere without being worried that someone more powerful will hurt them," said Dallas. ■