

# A.C. girl Northeast top youth

By **DIANE D'AMICO**

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Atlantic City Boys and Girls Club member Sparkle Prevard, 18, was named the Northeast Regional Boys and Girls Club Youth of the Year at a competition at the Yale Club in New York City on Tuesday night.



Prevard, a 2014 graduate of Atlantic City High School, had already been named the New Jersey Youth of the Year in June. She now is one of five regional finalists who will go on to the national contest in Washington, D.C., in September, where she will also meet President Barack Obama.

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**PREVARD**

"It feels amazing," Prevard said Wednesday after returning home from New York. "I had been giving myself a pep talk about how it

would be OK to lose, and then they called my name."

Michael Everett, director of the Champions of Youth Program at the Atlantic City Boys & Girls Club, went with Prevard to New York. He said the competition was stiff, but Prevard impressed everyone with her speech.

Prevard was one of the finalists chosen to speak at the dinner, which also included finalists for the Military Youth of the Year. She said she was the first to speak and was nervous, but afterward people told her she should be a motivational speaker.

"She knocked it out of the ballpark," Everett said. "People had tears in their eyes."

The finalists arrived in New York on Sunday. On Monday, they volunteered at a food bank and went bowling.

"(Bowling) was fun, but I lost, and lost and lost," Prevard said, Tuesday was spent meeting with the judges and doing interviews.

Prevard is the fourth Atlantic City club member in the last seven years to be named the New Jersey Youth of the Year. Everett said club officials told him she is the first New Jersey winner to win the regional title in 40 years.

Atlantic City attorney Rona Kaplan, who has been Prevard's Champions of Youth mentor, said she found out Tuesday night and is extremely excited for her. She was very involved with Prevard and is thrilled to see how she has blossomed.

Everett said with all of the financial struggles the club has been having this year, he hopes Prevard's win can show how valuable the Boys & Girls Club is to children in Atlantic City.

"This really shows what the club can do for them," he said. Richard Stockton College this year agreed to sponsor the Champions of Youth program. At the end-of-the-year ceremony in June, all of the graduating seniors had college plans.

Prevard will attend Stockton and recently completed the Educational Opportunity Fund summer program at the college. She has already earned scholarships as the local, state and regional winner, and if she wins the national title will get an additional \$50,000.

As a community service project, she and club member Raquel White have been working to start a group to give youths a voice in the city. She plans to be a community organizer and has cited Stockton's first Activist in Residence Erin O'Hanlon as a role model. She said she is very excited about the chance to meet the president of the United States, who was once himself a community organizer.

"I'm going to get to meet the ultimate community organizer," she said.

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