



EXCEPTIONAL TEEN NAMED NEW JERSEY YOUTH OF THE YEAR BY BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS IN NEW JERSEY

Melia D. Gaines Set To Receive College Scholarships And Vie For Regional Title This June

Clifton, NJ, May 24, 2021 – Selected among 16 outstanding New Jersey youth, Melia from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Cumberland County, has been named the New Jersey State Youth of the Year by Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey and Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

The Youth of the Year title is a prestigious honor bestowed upon an exemplary young person in recognition of leadership, service, academic excellence, and dedication to live a healthy lifestyle. Now in its 74th year, the Youth of the Year program honors our nation’s most awe-inspiring young people on their path to great futures. As the New Jersey Youth of the Year, Melia will serve as an ambassador for all teens in the state and will receive a \$12,500 college scholarship from Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey and Boys & Girls Clubs of America. Melia will go on to contend for the Northeast Regional Youth of the Year and ultimately the national title.

Melia has been a Club member for 12 years where she has participated in many Club programs that helped her find her voice to speak about important issues with her peers. She served as President of the Keystone Club, a teen group dedicated to leadership and community service, and participated in over 2,000 hours of community service work in her local community over the past several years. Melia has maintained a 4.1 GPA throughout high school and was admitted to the National Honor Society. She will graduate from Vineland High School this June and will attend Howard University in the Fall.

Melia’s career aspiration is to be a nurse practitioner or doctor. The Club programs that she participated in that made a big impact on her were Power Hour which helped her maintain her high grades and SMART Girls, in which she was able to learn how to become an independent and fierce young woman. Melia also started her own dance program at the Club with her twin sister, titled Dance 360, in which she uses various dance styles to combat racism. Melia was also a panelist on a recent Youth Bias event held by the Cumberland County Prosecutor’s Office in which she related her experiences of racial bias in schools. Her platform is fighting racial disparity in the healthcare system.

“We are incredibly proud of Melia and all the Youth of the Year nominees,” said Susan Haspel, State Director of Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey. “Being named NJ Youth of the Year is a lifelong honor. As the New Jersey Youth of the Year, Melia will serve as a spokesperson for Boys & Girls Club kids and teens across the state as a role model that they can admire and emulate.”

Founded in 1947 as Boys & Girls Clubs of America’s premier youth recognition program, Youth of the Year recognizes outstanding contributions to a member’s family, school, community and Boys & Girls Club. The Youth of the Year program is supported by Toyota and Mondelēz. As the Signature Sponsor of Youth of the Year, Toyota is committed to partnering with Boys & Girls Clubs of America to ensure local Clubs provide life-enhancing opportunities for kids and teens to explore, develop and apply the

essential skills they need to be successful in life and work. As the Lead Sponsor of Youth of the Year, Mondelēz International, will engage with local Clubs year-round to help foster a new generation of leaders prepared to live in and lead a diverse global economy. Youth of the Year representatives are the workforce leaders, innovators and problem-solvers of tomorrow.

This June, Melia will join other state winners to vie for the Northeast regional title. If named the regional winner, she will be awarded an additional \$20,000 college scholarship. Six youth, including five regional winners and a military youth winner, will advance to the virtual National Youth of the Year event in September 2021 to compete for the title of Boys & Girls Clubs of America's National Youth of the Year. The National Youth of the Year will receive an additional scholarship of \$50,000 and a brand-new Toyota Corolla.

For more information about the Youth of the Year program, visit www.youthoftheyear.org

About Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey

Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey is an alliance of 22 Boys & Girls Club organizations serving more than 71,000 youth ages 5-18 throughout the Garden State. Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey is a collaborative effort representing all 22 Clubs with the purpose of building local Club capacity; raising public awareness; and securing resources and financial support to increase the impact and reach of NJ Clubs. Learn more at www.bgcnj.org

About Boys & Girls Clubs of America

For 160 years, Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA.org) has enabled young people most in need to achieve great futures as productive, caring, responsible citizens. Today, more than 4,700 Clubs serve over 4.6 million young people through Club membership and community outreach. Clubs are located in cities, towns, public housing and on Native lands throughout the country, and serve military families in BGCA-affiliated Youth Centers on U.S. military installations worldwide. They provide a safe place, caring adult mentors, fun and friendship, and high-impact youth development programs on a daily basis during critical non-school hours. Club programs promote academic success, good character and citizenship, and healthy lifestyles. In a Harris Survey of alumni, 54 percent said the Club saved their lives. National headquarters are located in Atlanta. Learn more about Boys & Girls Clubs of America on Facebook and Twitter.

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