

Stockton Record

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STOCKTON - Courtney Hayes, 15, enjoys her volunteer work helping to provide therapeutic horseback riding for children with disabilities.

The avid horseback rider takes care of the horses and will sometimes lead them during the children's rides, she said.

One of her greatest moments on the job is when a child first meets an equine - huge by comparison and weighing hundreds of pounds.

"I see so much love and joy and overcoming of any kind of fears," she said. "It's inspiring."

Hayes, herself, is being recognized for meeting and overcoming her own challenges and goals.

She will receive a silver medal from Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Stockton, at his office today.

The Congressional Award Program is a nonpartisan and noncompetitive award that recognizes youth who challenge themselves to set and meet personal goals.

A silver medal is the second-highest level of accomplishment within the program.

Progress is measured by how much time is spent achieving goals in four areas: volunteer public services, personal development, physical fitness and expedition-exploration. Time spent is cumulative. The minimum age to register is 13 1/2 and the goals must be reached by age 24.

Hayes racked up service time at Project R.I.D.E. in Elk Grove, from helping with stable chores to leading horses during lessons. She read and discussed the Bible for her personal development, worked to increase her endurance riding on horseback to fulfil the physical-fitness requirement and met her exploration goal by hiking and rafting.

Hayes, a home-schooled 10th-grader, said she hopes to earn a gold medal by the time she graduates.

After that, the goal she is setting for herself is to study law.