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Sully Wins 'Youth Of Year'

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SUBMITTED PHOTO Recent Wagner High School graduate Ivy Sully holds plaques she has won as South Dakota's "Youth of the Year" for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

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WAGNER -- Ivy Sully doesn't serve in the military, but she lives by the Marine motto of "Carpe Diem" -- "Seize The Day."

The recent Wagner High School graduate said she picked up the phrase from "Upward Bound" sessions at the University of South Dakota. The program helps prepare young people for post-secondary education, she said.

"The 'Upward Bound' director, Charlie Lucke, makes motivational speeches and always uses the phrase. It's my favorite saying," Sully said. "When I wake up each morning, I look for something new -- to seize the day.' Every day is a little different, and I take every opportunity that comes along."

Sully has taken opportunities not only to better herself but to help others. In one example alone, she has volunteered 900 hours of community service at the Boys & Girls Club of the Yankton Sioux (BGCYS) in Wagner.

Sully's service to others has earned her the title of "Youth of the Year" for the state of South Dakota by the Boys & Clubs of America (BGCA). Sully will receive a \$1,000 scholarship from the Reader's Digest Foundation as part of the 60th anniversary of the "Youth of the Year" program. She will also receive a \$2,362.50 AmeriCorps education award for her club service.

Did she expect to win the state title? "I was surprised and shocked," she admitted.

This summer, Sully will compete with 12 other youth from states located in BGCA's Midwest Region. If named the regional winner, she will be awarded a \$10,000 college scholarship and advance to national competition in Washington D.C. The "National Youth of the Year" receives an additional \$15,000 college scholarship and will be installed by President Bush during an Oval Office ceremony.

"We are excited about Ivy being on her way to the Midwest Regional contest," said Robert Smith, executive director of the Wagner club. "Ivy is truly a young lady who has stood out among her peers and has been a leader in the club or community."

At the July regional contest in Chicago, Sully will give a speech about her Boys & Girls Club and its impact on her and the community. She will also undergo a formal one-on-one interview with judges.

She will also submit an essay on a topic of her choice. She has written on the importance of moral character.

As for the Boys & Girls Club's impact, she can speak directly from her heart about her own experiences. Her mentoring at the club has prepared her for the regional contest, enabling her to gain the confidence needed for public speaking.

"For the contest, I talk about the club and how it has taught me how to become a mature person," she said. "I like helping at the club. The kids are different ages (from 6-18 years old), dealing with life. The kids have changed me, and the club has matured me more."

Regardless of the regional outcome, Sully has already joined an elite group. A five-year member of the Wagner club, she has advanced from the original field of more than 4.6 million Boys & Girls Club members in all 50 states and on U.S. military bases worldwide. The Boys & Girls Club members belong to about 4,000 neighborhood-based facilities.

Being named "Youth of the Year" is the highest honor a Boys & Girls Club member can receive. The title recognizes outstanding contributions to a member's family, school, community and Boys & Girls Club, as well as personal challenges and obstacles overcome.

If Sully wants advice on preparing for the regional competition, she need look no further than Wagner High School classmate Jeff Seiner, an eight-year member of the Boys & Girls Club of the Yankton Sioux. Seiner who won the 2006 "Youth of the Year" honor for South Dakota.

"They were recognized (at high school commencement) for their scholarship," Smith said. "We are extremely proud of both Ivy and Jeff and for them winning back-to-back state titles for our organization -- especially since we have been chartered only since 1998."

Sully will attend Southeast Technical School in Sioux Falls, majoring in marketing, while Seiner will attend National Guard training before enrolling at Lake Superior State University, just outside Duluth, Minn., Smith said.

Sully's departure after graduation will leave a huge gap for the Boys & Girls Club of the Yankton Sioux, Smith said. Sully racked up her 900 hours of service in two years, during the ClubService program her junior and senior years, he said.

"Ivy has worked the front desk, in the learning center, game room, gym, snack room, tech center and teen center," Smith said. "In addition, Ivy has worked with the cheerleading squad and football program. She coached the first and second graders in basketball, refereed and ran the clock for the third and fourth graders, and (worked with) our gymnastics camp."

Sully said she was surprised to learn she had logged so many hours at the club in such a short period of time.

"At first, I really didn't think I had that many hours, but I have averaged 15 hours a week for nearly two years," she said.

While she enjoys working with all age groups, Sully said she has found special enjoyment coaching the first and second graders.

"They have a lot of energy. It's such a fun age," she said. "You hear them tell a lot of jokes about anything they learned at school."

Sully also works with the mentoring program offered at the club. "In mentoring, you work with younger students. You help them with their homework and their personal problems at home," she said.

The club offers activities such as traditional American Indian beading, drumming, and fancy shawl dancing alongside alcohol and drug prevention, health and fitness, the arts and educational programs.

The Boys & Girls Club and the Upward Bound program have in turn exerted a positive influence on Sully's academics.

"It got me to realize how important grades are to me. I had been on the B' honor roll, and I recently reached the goal of being on the A' honor roll," she said. "The Boys & Girls Club has educational programs like Achievement Matters.' We promote things like the Mountain Climber Award' and the A' Team and the Circle of Excellence.' Last year, I got the Mountain Climber Award' and this year, I got the A' Team award."

Sully said she has also been molded by the club's adult staff members.

"The influence of the staff that I work with is that they are very helpful and talkative," she said. "I do not think I have ever volunteered anywhere else where the place is so comfortable and happy to be in."

Besides her work with the Boys & Girls Club of the Yankton Sioux, Sully serves on the Wagner school district's Indian Education Committee. The daughter of John and Irene Sully, she knows firsthand the importance of culture with her American Indian-Filipino heritage.

"We try to bring in cultural things, like Native American games," she said. "They hired a Native American counselor for high school and younger children. They help them with their personal problems and dealing with school and cultural things."

Recent events in the Wagner school have included a powwow and feather ceremony for this year's American Indian graduates.

"We give those for the Native American seniors, going out into the reality of the world," Sully said. "We are saying, oWe pray for you, and we wish you good luck.' The Native American graduates receive an eagle feather and star quilt."

Sully also participated in the six-mile walk, open to the public, fighting methamphetamine use.

With such a wide range of contributions, Sully has served the entire community, Smith said.

"Ivy is truly a role model and leader that we can all be proud of," he said. "Ivy is a tremendous asset who will be sorely missed."