



Rachel Gladstone: Growing up with Caleb Smith State Park as her backyard, Smithtown High School West senior Rachel Gladstone developed a love for nature at a very early age. Her awareness of the destruction of our natural world began when she was just six years old; on a family road trip Rachel observed a clear cut forest for the first time and promptly burst into tears at the sight of the empty, wounded landscape. At the age of ten, she was horrified to learn about the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and as she grew older, Rachel's passion to protect our natural resources strengthened until at the age of 16 her resolve to make a difference came to fruition.

As a member of Girl Scouts Troop Number 295, ready to earn her Gold Award, Rachel was eager to get involved with a large service fundraising project to better her community and its natural areas. She was inspired upon visiting beautiful Sunken Meadow State Park with her high school cross country team.

Observing trash cans overflowing with plastic bottles, Rachel recognized that those bottles would end up in landfills, or littering our landscapes and oceans. She then began to conceive of a way to raise funds for a large scale recycling program in the park to prevent this from happening. On June 13th, 2015, she hosted the first ever *Sunken Meadow Recycling Project 5K and ½ Mile Fun Run* and raised almost \$5,000 with over 150 runners and volunteers participating. All funds raised were used to purchase recycling bins for the park.

Since 10th grade, Rachel has also participated in a leadership program called Rotary Youth Leadership Awards (RYLA). Starting out as a camper, she is now a member of the Youth Committee. The Youth Committee is a group comprised of seven dedicated and strong leaders, chosen out of 300 RYLA participants, who are placed in charge of running RYLA during the member's senior year. Rachel and the other members of the team will plan all of RYLA events including the Summer RYLA Program, which develops strong communication skills, tolerance towards all people, and higher self- esteem.

With all that Rachel her participation in RYLA, she knows that she truly can make a difference. Rachel understands that her generation will be the future stewards of our planet and the caretakers of our natural areas and wildlife. She takes this role very seriously. She plans to major in environmental science in college and has dreams of cleaning up the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. Her motto is: Nothing is impossible. If you work hard enough and keep your passion alive, dreams can become reality.

has learned from conceptualizing and coordinating her first large scale fundraising event, as well as