



[NJDOE News](#)

Contact: Richard Vespucci
For Release: October 3, 2001

State Board Recognizes Ninth Grader from Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School

Erin Puck, a ninth grade student at Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School, was recognized today by the State Board of Education for her contributions to her community.

Erin is the first student to be honored by the State Board in a new recognition program designed to highlight each month a student or a group of students for their accomplishments in community service, the arts, academics, sports, or other areas.

"Erin is a remarkable young lady who has overcome serious personal adversity to be successful and to help others," said State Board of Education President Maud Dahme. "I admire her for her many accomplishments on behalf of children who are hospitalized."

"Erin is known for her powerful gift of persuasion, and her willingness to give her full commitment to her cause," said Commissioner of Education Vito A. Gagliardi. "She has touched many lives in a positive way. I commend her for her good work."

Erin is a philanthropist who has persuaded others to donate 11,000 toys and \$17,000 for videophone equipment through **TOYS.CALM**, an organization she started. Last spring, when she was 13, Erin was honored as the first junior humanitarian at the Fifth Annual Humanitarian of the Year Dinner sponsored by the FoodBank of Monmouth and Ocean Counties.

She chose to help other children with serious illnesses after her own bout with a brain tumor and subsequent experience with surgery and chemotherapy.

She has personally gained the support of the ShoreCats professional basketball team, which agreed to her request to grant fans free admission if they donated a toy at the gate. She also persuaded Big Joe Henry, the oldies DJ on 101.5 FM, to promote a toy drive at last summer's concerts at Windward Beach. Erin and Big Joe are working on ways to expand **TOYS.CALM**.

"When Erin does things, she does them right," said Peter Righi, principal of Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School. "Her web site includes a mission statement, best summed up in Point Five: *To do whatever we can to help children cope while in hospitals and while recovering.*"

"Courage, compassion and drive are her hallmarks," Righi said.

Erin's mother Laura accompanied her and Righi to the meeting.