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NEWS RELEASE

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Covina-Valley Unified Junior Earns Congressional Award Gold Medal Through Service and Innovation

COVINA, CA – South Hills High School junior Denise Lee has spent the last two years volunteering in her community, developing innovative technology, launching a small business, and strengthening her athletic skills, efforts that have earned her the highest honor the U.S. Congress bestows upon young Americans, the Congressional Award Gold Medal.

To earn the Gold Medal, Lee completed 400 hours of Voluntary Public Service, 200 hours of Personal Development, and 200 hours of Physical Fitness, along with a five-day, four-night exploration of a new environment or culture.

“I think that life is all about living to the fullest,” Lee said. “I like to be busy, and I’ve always enjoyed meeting new people and trying new things. I was already doing many of these things because they are my passions, so it just seemed right to try to go for the award. I’m so honored to have received it.”

Lee dedicated much of her service time to helping younger students succeed. Each week, she volunteers at a local science, technology, engineering, and mathematics academy, where she teaches children to code in Python and C++. She also leads the academy’s English as a Second Language program, helping international students strengthen their English writing and communication skills.

Her passion for technology and coding also fueled her personal development, leading her to develop an app called OceanSweep that promotes beach clean-up programs and educates users about environmental stewardship. The app also earned her recognition as a Congressional App Challenge winner.

Lee further utilized her coding and entrepreneurship skills to develop a website for her small business, BunnyCove. After discovering two rabbits in her backyard that had given birth to a litter of baby bunnies, she created a website and social media platform to help responsibly place the animals into loving homes.

As a student-athlete on South Hills High’s tennis and basketball teams, Lee fulfilled the Physical Fitness requirement through regular practice, summer training, and athletic camps. For her exploration requirement, she took a road trip to Sacramento with her brother, visiting the state capitol, Old Town Sacramento, and other historic sites.

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“I really look up to my family,” Lee said. “My parents both immigrated to the United States when they were young and are incredibly hardworking and encouraging of my goals. I truly wouldn’t have received this award without their support.”

At South Hills High, Lee is the founder and president of the robotics club and serves as president of HOSA – Future Health Professionals. She is also enrolled in the school’s medical career technical education pathway and participates in the Chinese language program, working toward earning the Seal of Biliiteracy.

After graduating, Lee said she hopes to attend Stanford University or the University of Southern California, major in computer engineering, and ultimately pursue a career as a neurosurgeon.

“Denise is an incredible student whose care and dedication to her community have already left a lasting impact,” Superintendent Dr. Jonathan Blackmore said. “We are so proud of her for this accomplishment and look forward to seeing what she takes on next!”

Lee will travel to Washington, D.C. in June to receive her Gold Medal.

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

CVUSD_LEE1: South Hills High School junior Denise Lee volunteers at a local STEM academy, teaching students how to code. Lee’s volunteer work contributed to her earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal.

CVUSD_LEE2: As part of earning the Congressional Award Gold Medal, South Hills High School junior Denise Lee used her coding and entrepreneurship skills to start a small business where she helps find baby bunnies loving homes.

CVUSD_LEE3: South Hills High School junior Denise Lee won the Congressional App Challenge for her app, OceanSweep, which promotes environmental stewardship through beach clean-up.

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