

## LOCAL

## Out of tragedy, super-volunteer emerges

### FORT ROUGE TEEN FINALIST FOR NATIONAL AWARD

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A young Fort Rouge resident, who lived through the deaths of both her parents last year, has been shortlisted for a national award recognizing her volunteerism.

Kakeka ThunderSky, 18, is a finalist in the 2016 Everyday Political Citizen awards. The awards are organized by Samara Canada, a non-partisan charity dedicated to reconnecting citizens to politics. They're meant to highlight and encourage the many ways citizens can engage in politics as unelected leaders in their communities.



BORIS MINKEVICH / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS

Kakeka ThunderSky, 18, is shortlisted for a 2016 Everyday Political Citizen award from Samara Canada.

"It's crazy and so surreal," ThunderSky said of making the short list. "Even if I don't get (the award), everyone's showing their support and being nice and kind. It's amazing."

ThunderSky, an education student at the University of Winnipeg, has spent her time organizing clothing drives for Siloam Mission and Salvation Army, and delivering Christmas hampers with the Christmas Cheer Board. She volunteers with Got Bannock? and at Thunderbird House.

As a student at Churchill High School, ThunderSky was involved in numerous student groups, including Aboriginal Leadership, Student Leadership, and Women's Health and Wellness, through which she helped educate peers about mental health, missing and murdered indigenous women, and residential schools.

ThunderSky says she is influenced by her mother, Raven ThunderSky, who died last Christmas Eve after a long journey with cancer.

Raven ThunderSky was an advocate for victims of asbestos-linked cancers and was involved in the call for a national inquiry into missing and slain indigenous women and girls.

"I always grew up at rallies and kind of seeing her on the news and stuff like that," ThunderSky said. "I want to carry that on for her."

ThunderSky's father died in January from diabetes-related health complications.

She credited family and friends with helping her get through the loss of both parents in the same year.

"It was definitely surreal and kind of heartbreaking, and it was obviously really hard," she said. "I have a really good support group."

ThunderSky said serving with the cheer board has been the most personal of all her volunteering opportunities.

The organization provides hampers of food and presents to Winnipeggers who are living on income assistance, or are among the working poor.

ThunderSky has 12 siblings and recalled her family receiving those hampers when she was growing up.

"They've done so much for us in the past, so it's an amazing feeling to give back to them," she said.

ThunderSky is headed to Toronto this week for a celebration on Thursday, during which the Everyday Political Citizen award winners will be announced.

There are 19 finalists in three categories: ages under 18; 18-29; and 30. The finalists were selected from a group of 240 nominees by a jury of prominent Canadians, including CBC personality Rick Mercer.

"Out of tragedy, Kakeka chose to try and improve the lives of those around her," Mercer said in a release. "To take action like this, to become a leader among your peers when — even at the best of times — it is so easy to retreat into your own world, is something I greatly admire."

ThunderSky, the only Winnipegger on the shortlist, is excited to represent her city at the celebration.

"It's nice to be (nominated for) this award because there's a lot of great stuff in Winnipeg," she said. "I love this city."

If you know a special volunteer, contact [aaron.epp@gmail.com](mailto:aaron.epp@gmail.com).