

Congressman Lee Terry made a special trip to Bellevue Monday to preside over a Congressional Award Program ceremony recognizing 10 teens from Offutt and the local area.

Each of the teens answered the challenge to help others, better themselves, get in great physical shape and learn how to explore the world as part of the Congressional Award Program.

The program, established in 1979 by then President Jimmy Carter, "encourages young Americans to challenge themselves and recognizes young people who set and achieve goals in four program areas: volunteer public service, personal development, physical fitness and expedition/exploration activities," according to the congressional award Web site.

Each level of the Congressional Award program is cumulative, beginning with bronze, silver

and gold certificates which carry over to bronze, silver and gold medals. The minimum age to earn an award in the program is 14 and goals must be achieved by the person's 24th birthday.

During this week's ceremony, Bryan and Kevin Watson, sons of Chief Master Sgt. Thomas and Hyeyong Watson, each received silver and gold medals.

Bryan, a senior at Bellevue West High School, is active in the men's drill team, varsity marching band, Sarpy County Teen Court, piano and the National Honor and Kitty Hawk societies. He's also a cadet major and wing finance officer for his Air Force Junior ROTC detachment. In earning his gold and silver medals, Bryan performed more than 400 hours of volunteer service at various Offutt facilities as well as with the American Red Cross. While volunteering, he provided customer service at the Offutt Field House, worked at the Leonard Lawrence Elementary School carnival and folded pocket flags for deployed members. He also improved his musical knowledge by taking more than 200 hours of piano lessons, bettered his physical fitness with 200 hours of attendance at Bellevue West's summer marching band camp and multiple out-of-state competitions. For his expedition/exploration achievement, Bryan planned a trip to Yellowstone National Park, where he camped for five days and four nights and hiked to see Old Faithful, mud volcanoes and Dragon's Mouth Spring.

Kevin, a sophomore at Bellevue West, is active in the men's drill team, varsity marching band, high ability learner program, Sarpy County Teen Court and junior varsity tennis, and enjoys playing drums. He's a cadet technical sergeant and flight commander for his AFJROTC detachment. On the road to his medals, Kevin volunteered 400 hours at various Offutt facilities and at the Bellevue Invitational Drill Team Competition, and at a local VFW-sponsored fireworks booth. He also spent 200 hours improving his fitness through weight training and attending the Bellevue West summer marching band camp. For his personal development, he improved his drum and percussion skills. He also planned a trip to Yellowstone National Park for his expedition/exploration and became more knowledgeable in the geological make-up of the area.

Also during the ceremony, the following teens received Congressional Award bronze medals: Christine Baude, daughter of Lt. Col. Brien and Noel Baude, 1st Airborne Command Control Squadron; Catherine Buennemeyer, daughter of retired Maj. John and Nancy Buennemeyer; Emily Edwards and Colin Sorensen.

In addition to the Congressional Award medalists, the following individuals were presented Congressional Award certificates for their achievements: Wayne Banks, son of retired Master Sgt. Wayne and Angela Banks; Laura VanEpps, daughter of retired Maj. Roger and Danette VanEpps; and Nicholas Szczepaniak were awarded silver certificates. Jamie Fields, daughter of retired Senior Master Sgt. John and Christine Fields, was awarded a bronze certificate.

"You have set yourself apart from your peers," Congressman Terry said to the winners gathered at the Bellevue Public Schools/Offutt Welcome Center. "You have established yourself now, at this very early stage of your life, as a leader ... you have the responsibility now because you've been recognized for your leadership, to continue those efforts in your next phase of life.

"Ask yourself whether you have made a difference in someone's life and that will be your measure of leadership."

Airmen under the age of 23 interested in enrolling in the program are encouraged to call LeAnn Clausen or Glenn Simms at 294-6247. Glenn Dudley and Michelle Derks coordinate the program for family members ages 14 to 18 at the youth center and can be reached at 294-5152.

