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Hero: Sarah Thompson

A Woman of Passion; an Inspiration to All

When I first met Sarah Thompson, she was wearing metallic purple pants with a woven blouse from Central America. My first impression of her was a nucleus of energy, bound up and literally leaking excitement and passion to whomever she spoke with. When I heard of her numerous involvements, I remember being in awe of her incredible drive and selflessness. Since that first encounter, I have always looked up to Sarah as a source of inspiration and encouragement and as an advocate for a more just, peaceful, and community-oriented world. It is because of her outstanding contributions to the local and global community as well as her personal impact on the lives of young women that I nominate Sarah Thompson as a Hoosier Hero.

Sarah began her ambitious life with the decision to attend Spelman College after growing up as an African-American in a primarily white community. She chose to attend this all-woman, African-American college because of the opportunity it presented her to connect with her cultural roots and be stretched in new ways. She ended up flourishing and leaving her mark there, as she does every place she goes, serving as the prestigious Student Body President. While in Atlanta, she was also actively involved in the King Center, working as a tour coordinator and as a speech writer for the annual "Tribute to the King Legacy" gala event. At the rally at the end of the official Martin Luther King Day parade, she even had the honor of being the featured speaker. In recognition of her outstanding community involvement and work for peace in Atlanta, she received the Citizen Award from American University in Washington,

D.C. She was also recognized for her ongoing interest in international relations by being named a Fulbright Scholar in 2007, which sent her to work in an Executive Teaching Assistantship in Rosario, Argentina.

After completing college, Sarah devoted herself to working for many causes and non-for-profit organizations instead of seeking personal income. In 2006, she joined the Bike Movement, biking 3,684 miles across the U.S. in a seven-week period. During this time, she was able to create connections between countless young people across the nation and discuss together their role and vision for the future of our world. Meanwhile, the movement also raised over \$25,000 to send young people from third-world countries to a global church summit in Paraguay.

Since her trip with the Bike Movement, Sarah has devoted her time to volunteer work in the local community. She has worked primarily with Family Services of Elkhart County, helping women who are victims and survivors of domestic violence and volunteering at the Elkhart County Women's Shelter. These past three years have also found her teaching free Spanish classes to adults and running a Table Top English program, which brings together both English and Spanish-speaking neighbors to learn each other's language. Through sharing their life stories and personal passions, the participants are not only able to improve their language skills, but also form lasting relationships with their neighbors and build a greater sense of community. In pursuing further her passion for building community, Sarah became an integral member of the Historic Roosevelt Community Association, in which the neighborhood rallied to save a storied elementary school from demolition. They succeeded and have now renovated the school into a community center with affordable apartments for low-income families.

Sarah has demonstrated an unstoppable drive not only to build community locally among neighbors, but also to promote connections and discussion between young people and future leaders of our nation and world. She has inspired me to live a life of service to others and to be confident in my ability to lead as a young adult and a young woman. As evidenced by all she has accomplished by age 25, she has showed me that I don't need to wait until I "grow up" to start making a difference in the world. She has been a role model which many have looked up to, especially underprivileged young women who are afraid to dream about the possibilities the future holds for them. She has also been a mentor and motivator to many young people in my community, challenging us to try new things and become the best we can be. Just last spring, she encouraged me to run a half-marathon, training with me when she had time and cheering me on all the way to the finish. Running a half-marathon was something that I doubted I could ever do, yet she encouraged me and gave me the confidence I needed to take on that challenge. As a successful athlete herself, she was inducted into the Elkhart Sports Hall of Fame in 2008, joining the ranks of a select group of athletes and coaches who've left a lasting mark on the community.

Sarah Thompson is a Hoosier Hero, impacting the lives of many people in the community as well as across our nation and world. Her endless energy, incredible passion, and dedication to her work and mission are what make her a highly respected role model. As a confident woman with an innate ability for exciting and involving people, she has strived for peace and justice in our society, working to heal and bring hope to the abused and less fortunate; she has brought the local community together, helping to eliminate language barriers; she has worked to connect young people and future leaders of our world so that together we can envision a brighter future; and most importantly, she has been an inspiration and a Hoosier Hero not only to me, but also to the vast community of people who've been blessed by her impact.