

[Volunteers in the News](#)

Meeting Kids Like Courtney Avila Happens 'Once in a Lifetime,' Teacher Says

Courtney Avila, 17, of San Juan Capistrano, is being recognized for her volunteer work.

By Patch Staff | [Email the author](#) | 2:00pm

For many high school students, current events amount to nothing more than dating gossip and voting for prom king and queens. Volunteering can often be something that simply helps make a college application more impressive.

Not so for 17-year-old Courtney Avila, a JSerra Catholic High School senior.

Inspired by her brother, stricken with [mitochondrial disease](#), Avila has been volunteering since she was 10-years-old at [Special Camp for Special Kids](#) in San Juan Capistrano, where she works with physically and mentally disabled children. On the other side of the generational spectrum, Courtney plays bingo once a month at the [Del Obispo Terrace](#) senior living center.

For the numerous altruistic contributions she makes, Avila is the May 2011 recipient of the [O'Connor Mortuary Heart and Soul Award](#).

"I have been teaching for 25 years and you only come across kids like Courtney once in a lifetime," said Mike Borowski, Avila's teacher at JSerra Catholic High School in San Juan Capistrano.

Avila said that while growing up, she witnessed her brother's triumphs against adversity. Despite the challenges that come with mitochondrial disease—which affects motor control and weakens muscles, among others—she said he is one of the happiest and liveliest people she knows.

In addition to her volunteer work, Courtney started the lacrosse team at JSerra, a program that is still going strong; and recently traveled to China to participate in the [Ambassadors for Peace](#) program, speaking on global leadership before an audience of 500 Chinese students.

She plans to attend college at [Texas Christian University](#) in the fall and volunteer at a daycare for Down syndrome children.

"This young lady is full of life and love and everything a school and a teacher could ever wish to have as a student," said Borowski.

