

2026 NVSL Scholarship Recipients



Presidents' Award - Sophia Roberatory

Sophia has swum for the Rutherford Water Rats for 14 seasons. She also dove for two seasons. She began volunteer swim coaching in 2021, later became an assistant coach, and is now head swim coach. Sophia created a recruitment and retention program for Rutherford that has doubled the size of its developmental swim team and implemented a leadership program to mentor young leaders on her team. She swam for Fairfax Foxes throughout high school. She is also an Eagle Scout, serving the scouts in numerous leadership roles. Sophia has served Woodson High School and her community through her work with the Red Cross and Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership (HOBY). This fall, she plans to study engineering at Virginia Tech and participate in their Corps of Cadets.

"Rutherford raised me, helping shape me into a young adult who is then able to use the love of the sport instilled in me to give back and do the same for younger swimmers in the cycle. I may not have understood this when I was younger, or even as a new volunteer. However, 14 years later I am in the very spot that six year old me always dreamed of, and I see the true influence and impact of NVSL's difference."

Community Service Award - Hunter Guthrie



Hunter is a 13-year swimmer on the Hunter Mill Sharks and also swam one season for Fox Mill Woods. This is his third year as a coach for the Sharks. He has competed at both All-Stars and All-Star Relays several times and has won numerous high point awards for his team. He was a FISH club swim member for 13 years, and he swam on the James Madison High School varsity team all four years. Hunter established a non-profit called A Taste of Home to address food insecurity in Fairfax County. To date, his organization has donated over a million meals to a shelter in Reston and he has recruited over 450 student volunteers. His other service work includes serving for six years on the Maple Valley Library Teen Advisory Board and being a four-year member of the Northern Virginia Community College Student Government Association. Hunter has been a featured speaker on food waste reduction and other environmental issues at several national and global conferences. He will attend Brown University in the fall.

"More than the exact times or where I placed, I will fondly remember my teammates who became family, the coaches who believed in me, and the families who came together to make it happen. These lessons in support will stay with me for years to come, and I will always look back on my time with NVSL with fondness and gratitude."

Spirit Award - Liam Birch



Liam has swum for the Pinecrest Piranhas for 15 seasons. He has coached them in the summer for two years and in winter for three. He has competed in both Individual and Relay All-Stars and won the Most Spirited award on his team numerous times. He loves cheering and inspiring others to do their best. Liam is a co-founder of the non-profit Reston Stars, which provides scholarships for training in the arts. He is also very active in Young Men's Service League and volunteers as a swim instructor for the Fairfax Foxes Outreach Clinic. Liam has received the Presidential Gold Service Award for his extensive community service. At South Lakes High School, Liam performed in all the mainstage theater shows and held leadership positions in Theater Honor Society. He was a four-year varsity swimmer and qualified to States. He was also active in Japanese Honor Society and the high school chorus. This fall, Liam plans to study math at the University of Minnesota.

"The reason why this community is so welcoming is because it is built on the kindness and leadership of older swimmers, and as I leave to go to college, I hope that I can be remembered as an older kid that was able to give the same joy that I received back when I was little."

Sportsmanship Award - Helen Milito



Helen has been a Mount Vernon Park Gator since she was four years old. She started coaching as a volunteer at age 14 and is now assistant swim coach. She has received numerous team MVP awards and was chosen for the Leadership Award in 2023. She especially enjoys producing fun content for the team's Instagram and finding creative ways to build team spirit. At Episcopal High School, Helen was a three-sport varsity athlete, serving as captain of the soccer, squash, and tennis teams during her senior year. She also served as an admissions ambassador, freshman tutor, dorm monitor, Student Athlete Council representative, Activities Committee leader, and co-president of One Love. During her junior year, Helen studied abroad in Italy, where she served as editor-in-chief of her school's yearbook, tutored Italian students in English, and played on a local boys' soccer team. Helen plans to attend The University of Virginia in the fall to study public policy and leadership.

"Behind every race is a community of siblings, parents, coaches, volunteers, officials, and team representatives who dedicate countless hours to creating an experience for young swimmers. Many of them volunteer their time simply because they care about making the swimmers happy. Watching hundreds of people come together every summer to make something larger than themselves has shown me the power of service and collective effort."

Excellence in Technique Award - Gabriel Cervoni



Gabriel joined the Parklawn Piranhas at age eight. He has coached the team in both summer and winter for six years. He has also contributed to his team by creating software to generate meet lineups and collaborating with another coach to create a digital catalog demonstrating proper stroke technique, turns, and drills. He has received several team awards, including the Elmer Todd Award, the Rich and Lois Fein Heart of the Team Award, the Piranha Spirit Award, and the Most Improved Award. Gabriel is an Eagle Scout and has served his community by designing and building structures to support local wildlife, establishing and maintaining nature trails, and organizing food drives and stream clean-ups. He is a Congressional Award Gold Medal recipient for his volunteer service. At Annandale High School, Gabriel was a four-year member and captain of both the varsity swim and cross country teams. He plans to study mechanical engineering at Purdue University in the fall.

"I hope to leave behind a culture where swimmers race the clock and not each other, where swimmers have a mindset that one bad race doesn't define them, and overall, a team where friendships and the memories created matter more than the time they drop. I hope this mindset continues long after I'm gone."

About the NVSL Scholarships:

Presidents' Award - Created in honor of the volunteers who served as league presidents of NVSL.

Community Service Award - Created in honor of George MacDuff and daughter Melinda. George served as the league records chairperson for many years.

Spirit Award - Created in honor of Olivia Aull to recognize spirited swimmers and divers from within the NVSL family.

Sportsmanship Award - Created in honor of Joan Olson, long-time director of the NVSL and chairperson of the Seeding Committee, who was a passionate advocate for sportsmanship.

Excellence in Technique Award - Created in honor of Lou Sharp, founder of the Competition Swim Clinic, who guided generations of NVSL swimmers in stroke technique and love for swimming.