

Eastside High student to be honored by state leaders this week as Sunshine State Scholar

Eastside High School junior Shreya Pathak remembers anxiously awaiting every new 'Bill Nye the Science Guy' video and begging her mom to buy mini marshmallows and toothpicks so she and her brother could construct towers. Now she spends much of her free time working to inspire that same love for science in the next generation.

"Developing that passion at a young age is crucial to making children love science and want to go into those professions that will ultimately save our world," she said.



That passion for science and the commitment to pass it on have helped Pathak earn recognition as one of just 100 2018 Sunshine State Scholars. The Sunshine State Scholar Program, established more than twenty years ago, honors the state's top 11th-graders in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) subjects. Pathak was chosen as a Scholar based on criteria that include advanced coursework and grades, test scores, an essay, awards and honors and extracurricular activities.

During a two-day visit to Orlando later this week, Pathak and her fellow Scholars will meet with representatives of Florida's universities, learn about career opportunities, and engage in a 'think tank' tackling a STEM-related challenge affecting the state. The trip will end with an awards ceremony hosted by Florida Commissioner of Education Pam Stewart.

Pathak has a lengthy and impressive resume that includes a 5.00 weighted GPA in Eastside's rigorous International Baccalaureate Program. She's earned top scores on Advanced Placement exams and the SAT, has earned honors in subjects including Spanish, U.S. Government and English Language, won awards at regional and state science fairs and served in leadership positions in a variety of clubs at school. She's also currently conducting research at the University of Florida's Chemical Engineering Laboratory.

Science is certainly not the only subject in which Pathak excels. She's also an extremely talented and award-winning pianist and vocalist, and just last year earned a spot in the All-National Honor Choir. She's even played tennis for Eastside.

"I think it's important to have other interests, other outlets" said Pathak of her active and varied schedule. "It's a lot of hard work, but since they're all activities I want to do, I make time for them all."

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One of the activities that brings her the most joy is her work with STEM for Youth, an organization that brings hands-on science activities to elementary school students in the after-school program at the Cone Park Library. This year Pathak and her fellow students helped the children develop and build a vertical garden. In the process, the children conducted experiments on soil quality, water usage and other concepts. Ultimately the goal is to promote each child's appreciation for and interest in STEM.

"I want children to view STEM differently," she said. "By having them participate in projects with real world application, they become much more engaged and interested."

Pathak estimates that she has volunteered more than 200 hours in the past couple of years to the STEM for Youth program and other community organizations, including the South West Advocacy Group (SWAG), Peaceful Paths and the Indian Cultural and Educational Center.

Pathak even puts her talent for sewing to use in the service of others. A few years ago she began sewing and selling small purses made out of old Indian saris for \$10 a piece and has since donated hundreds of dollars in proceeds to SWAG for its after-school programs for disadvantaged children.

'All I want to do is make a difference in someone's life, not matter how big or small," she said. "It's a lot of work, but its beyond worth it when I see the smiles that I was able to help create."

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