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Press Release FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 15, 2010

Photo-Opportunity—Wednesday April, 21, 7:45 am till 9 am
Middletown High School South, Dwight Road, Middletown



MHSS senior Mariah Stewart arranged for the filmmaker to show his Emmy-award winning film "A Walk to Beautiful" to her high school. She hopes to encourage her fellow student to aid the plight of many outcast Ethiopian women (the subject of the documentary) via her community service project called "Community Squared."

Middletown Teen Hopes to Bridge Two Worlds in Community Squared Project

Middletown: As a ninth grader, Mariah Stewart's Dad took her to a premier of what would soon become an Emmy-winning documentary on the plight of very young Ethiopian mothers who are cast out of their families and communities, estranged from their babies and left to live alone all because of a common and very curable complication of childbirth. The documentary details the women's journey or *A Walk to Beautiful* (as the film is entitled) to a far away charity hospital where they receive an operation that cures their condition and essentially restores their life. Mariah was deeply affected by the film as the unfortunate young women were just about her age.

Three years later, Mariah, a gifted student and Commended National Merit Scholar, had the privilege of interning for the show's production company, Engel Entertainment Inc. in Manhattan, during the summer between her junior and senior year at Middletown's High School South (MHSS). As part of her intern responsibilities, she helped create transcripts for TV shows aired on Discovery, Health and the History channel; but her most cherished duty was researching distribution outlets for *A Walk to Beautiful*. She hoped to communicate to women in developing countries that a cure exists for this childbirth injury.

The ailment, known as an obstetric fistula or tear, occurs when a woman's body is too small to deliver a full-term baby. This is an issue particularly for young African mothers, who marry in their early teens and are not yet completely grown. Malnutrition may also stunt their development. While the condition is easily treated by a few surgical stitches in modern hospitals, these women receive no such treatment in their remote villages and humiliating incontinence may occur.

Mariah explains, "They are viewed as an embarrassment to their families since they cannot control their own bodies. They have no idea that this is not their fault and is something that can be easily fixed. Since the subject is taboo, it is very hard to publicize the treatment. While working on this project in New York, I saw a way the young people at South could actually make a difference."

As Co-President of the MHSS service club, Eagles Helping the Community (EHTC), which usually aids those in need in the Middletown community, Mariah endeavored to bridge the gulf between the worlds of the carefree American teens and the suffering Ethiopian mothers through a service project she calls *Community Squared*.

Mariah states, “I view this as a chance to expand our outreach to a wider community and to connect in a meaningful way with other people our age in a different part of the world.”

The project involves the simple task of collecting all types of material for quilting and then cutting them into 12 inch squares to send to the Ethiopian charity hospital where these women receive surgery. Mariah believes the quilts that the young women fashion from the donated material squares while they recover from surgery will become a visual advertisement for the surgery, and encourages other women in their villages to make that “Walk to Beautiful.”

Mariah adds, “Not only will the blanket that the recovering women create comfort them, it will become a memento of their miraculous recovery that will get people talking. When people ask how they got the quilt, they can communicate the important information that their condition can be fixed.”

The filmmakers, Steve Engel and his wife Heidi Reavis, who remain extremely committed to this cause, have agreed to send the quilt squares collected by American students to the Addis Ababa charity hospital where the women are treated at no charge. They have encouraged Mariah to spread her program to other high schools in the country.

Mariah has planned a grand kick-off for *Community Squared* by arranging to have Engel Entertainment come to High School South on the morning of Wednesday, April 21, for a showing of the documentary to sophomore students. A question and answer period will follow. High School South students will get the added benefit of questioning Emmy-award winning filmmakers on their craft. The program begins at 7:45 am and will run until 9 am.

The press is invited to take pictures and conduct interviews.

Mariah has accepted entrance into Wake Forrest University where she hopes to study history and psychology next year. Her experience has caused her to consider a career as a filmmaker. Her interests are very diverse: she was as an award-winning contestant in the Jersey Shore Science Fair and the Delaware Valley Science Fair in the subject of Behavioral Science. Her interests extend to art where she has volunteered as an Art teacher in the Horizons National Enrichment Program; she has painted murals at schools in Asbury Park and Rumson.

Her EHTC advisor, Anne Freiburger, states of her student, “I think it is phenomenal that Mariah has undertaken this project. She is a very gifted young lady who is using her many talents to help others. And like so many other leaders in EHTC, she is using her energy to encourage other students to be generous and kind to those less fortunate.”

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Mariah Stewart and her EHTC advisor, MHSS Math Teacher Anne Freiburger, display samples of the student donated quilt squares central to Mariah’s international community service project entitled *Community Squared*. The project could help transform the lives of ostracized Ethiopian girls. Middletown High School South students have donated the material from which Ethiopian women recovering from life-renewing surgery can create quilts that will communicate a story of hope and renewal for other young African women.