

Columbia Heights named an All-America City for 2016

By Shannon Prather (<http://www.startribune.com/shannon-prather/188067161/>) Star Tribune |

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Columbia Heights has been named an All-America City for 2016, a prize that eluded fellow metro-area contender Woodbury.

Both cities were among the 20 national finalists for the annual recognition, sponsored by the National Civic League. The All-America Awards this year focused on community efforts to "ensure that all our children are healthy and successful in school and life." Ten cities win the designation each year.

In Columbia Heights, a working-class immigrant city bordering Minneapolis, a city-school collaboration has helped lower youth crime and improve police-community relations. Officers and city staff work with schoolchildren as part of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, and a new city library is under construction.

"Why would the poor community of Columbia Heights give such a resounding yes to the extra financial burden? ... Opportunity. Pride. Connectedness," its application said.

In Woodbury, a sprawling white-collar suburb in Washington County, the Madison Claire Foundation worked with community groups and businesses to raise \$830,000 for an accessible playground at Bielenberg Sports Center. More than 100 volunteers installed the playground with the help of Habitat for Humanity.

That same month, a Woodbury city event drew more than 20,000 volunteers to raise money and pack more than 4 million meals for the Feed My Starving Children charity.

The National Civic League, a nonprofit think tank, has hosted the competition since 1949. It offers mostly bragging rights and a chance to learn from other places; the idea is that cities as different as Columbia Heights and Woodbury can both represent the all-America ideal.

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Fourth-grader Reanna Timoshenko and Columbia Heights firefighter Emily Cramble, her mentor, joked around about music.