



DAVID AMES/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

CHAMP fundraiser

Student raises \$20,000 to train mine-sniffing dog

To help her fellow man, 13-year-old Kristen Parkinson relies on man's best friend.

The Greenwich Country Day School student has helped raise \$20,000 to sponsor the training of a mine-sniffing dog deployed in a war-torn area of the Middle East. This month, she was honored for her efforts by Diana Enzi, wife of U.S. Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., during a ceremony in Washington for her work for the Children Against Mines Program, or CHAMPS, part of the humanitarian-aid Marshall Legacy Institute.

"I really love dogs, and I also like the idea that it was helping a lot of people," the seventh-grader said.

Inspired by a similar effort by her grandmother, Kristen began raising funds as a fourth-grader in 2006, bringing a donation box to school and "looking for coins around the house," she recalled. Later in fifth grade, she raised more funds through a school walkathon.

Her overall take: Roughly \$15,000, with a Greenwich-based benefactor, the Laura J. Niles Foundation, kicking

in an extra \$5,000.

Kristen later got to travel to Bosnia, where the dogs are trained, to hand select one of six mine-detecting canines — a 2-year-old German Shepherd that she named "Nutmeg," after her home state — to be deployed in Lebanon.

Kristen's efforts have not ended there. A competitive diver, she is also organizing a "dive-a-thon" at the Greenwich Family YMCA this February in hopes of raising \$6,000 to help pay for prosthetics for children in war-torn countries who have lost limbs to exploded mines.

The Stamford girl said her visit to the Balkans has driven her continued effort to help those in need.

In Bosnia, "You see everything that's going on — lots of bullets in buildings, deplorable conditions, tiny one-room houses, farmers who are afraid to move because they are afraid of hitting a mine," she said. "It really changes your mind."

— COLIN GUSTAFSON

Patriotic pride