

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## The ideal teen-ager

In 1971, when I started as a cub reporter at The Mercury, Boscov's Department Store sponsored an "Ideal Teen-ager" contest open to students from 12 area high schools.

There were more than 200 contestants. Contestants had a photo and brief biography in the newspaper, which listed their various activities and achievements. The winners, a boy and a girl, both seniors at Pottstown High School, won a weekend in Bermuda, chaperoned by a Mercury employee and his wife.



Commentary by  
Tom Hylton

Today, 50 years later, my "Ideal Teen-ager" is Greta Thunberg. She first started reading about climate change when she was 8 years old and was amazed no one was doing anything about it.

At the age of 15, she took off from school (with her parents' permission) and stood daily in front of the Swedish Parliament building in Stockholm, where she lives, with a sign reading *Skolstrejk for Klimatet* (school strike for climate).

Her public protest aimed to pressure the Swedish government to carry out unfulfilled climate pledges to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

She posted a photo of the first day of her solo strike, Aug. 20, 2018, on both Instagram and Twitter, and the next day, she was joined by other young protesters.

Her posts were quickly shared with hundreds of thousands of others on social media and attracted local reporters. Within weeks, their articles won international attention.

She joined demonstrations throughout Europe while still going to school, Mondays through Thursdays, allowing Fridays for continued striking.

In December 2018, just three months after her first lone vigil, and while she was still just 15, she addressed the plenary session of the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Katowice, Poland.

Her speech, in which she said world leaders were "not mature enough to tell it like it is" was viewed all over the world.

One month later, having just turned 16, she addressed the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in which she said "Our house is on fire." She then addressed the British, European and French parliaments, followed by a meeting with Pope Francis, who thanked her for her crusade and encouraged her to press on.

Meanwhile, she continued to attend school, except for her Friday school strikes, and earned good grades.

In August 2019, she took a sabbatical leave from school to visit North America. To avoid the carbon emissions of a plane, she sailed across the Atlantic with her father as guests on a yacht equipped with solar panels.

She addressed the United Nations General Assembly in September, followed by climate protests in three Canadian cities, followed by more protests in New York, Washington, and other U.S. cities.

All this before she was 19 years old. The Public Broadcasting System is currently airing a three-part documentary on her journey.

She is amazingly thoughtful and well spoken. Her autism, she says, has helped her to focus as a climate activist and not be afraid to speak out.

She is the living embodiment of philosopher Herbert Spencer's dictum: "The great aim of education is not knowledge, but action. Wisdom is the right use of knowledge."

