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Photos: Burnt Hills -Ballston Lake High School Student and Reality Check Member Named Capital Region Youth Ambassador of Year (YAYA)

YAYA is awarded annually to young activists who are leading the way toward the first tobacco-free generation.

Genevieve Hart recognized for her tobacco control advocacy efforts and contributions to Reality Check

(ALBANY, N.Y. Feb. 7, 2024)- Genevieve Hart, a junior at Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake High School, is the Capital Region Youth Ambassador of the Year (YAYA). The award, sponsored by Reality Check of New York, honors the outstanding work of young people who are taking the lead toward a tobacco-free generation.

“Since being involved with Reality Check, I have grown so much, I have learned so much. I've become a better leader, a better listener and have gone outside of my comfort zone. I really feel like I'm making a difference in my community and that's all I want to do,” said Hart.

Hart has been an active member of Reality Check since October 2022 and has provided a vital youth perspective on the impact of tobacco marketing. She has shared the story of a friend who is addicted to vaping at a Schenectady City Council meeting when the council was considering a moratorium on vape and smoke shops. She has educated her peers by creating posters about the “Scary Facts” of tobacco use that were used to educate two high school communities for Seen Enough Tobacco Day last October. She also wrote a letter to the editor that focused on these facts and on her firsthand experience with the problems of vaping in her school.

“Genny is perceptive, creative and highly motivated. But most of all, she cares about her community. She not only steps in when asked to help, but creates opportunities to educate her peers, the community and decision makers about the dire consequences of tobacco use and about the tobacco industry's efforts to recruit a new generation of tobacco users,” said Jeanie Orr, Program Manager, Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities (CDTFC).

Hart continues to show her leadership abilities within our Capital District Reality Check chapter. She moderated a discussion about the “Big Vape” documentary on Netflix, and helps our team with ideas for recruiting more youth to Reality Check. When she noticed that a vape shop between her high school and middle school had outdoor tobacco advertising, she decided to take action. Ultimately, the signage

was taken down and now the town of Burnt Hills is interested in learning more about what can be done to reduce tobacco marketing in the town. All because Hart was acting on what she saw.

Hart was recognized for her activism on Tuesday Feb. 6 at the State Capitol by NYS Tobacco Control Program partners and received a citation from Assemblywoman Mary Beth Walsh (R-Ballston).

Since 2001, youth from across New York State have worked to educate their communities about the harms of Big Tobacco. For more information about Reality Check of New York, visit www.RealityCheckofNY.org.

About Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities: Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities (CDTFC) is a NYS Bureau of Tobacco Control grant-funded program held by St. Peter's Health Partners. CDTFC works to increase support for New York state's tobacco-free norm through youth action and community engagement. Efforts are evidence-based, policy-driven, and cost-effective approaches that decrease youth tobacco use, motivate adult smokers to quit, and eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Visit www.smokefreecapital.org for more information.