



The Perlyn Family: Clockwise from left, Amanda, Chad, Eric, Marilyn, Don (seated).

THREE KIDS PLUS MOM AND DAD EQUAL LOTS OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Boca family shares its light

By KATE MCCLARE
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For the Perlyn family, public service is a way of life. So is collecting major awards for the help they give.

The latest accolade for the Boca Raton clan — who don't seek the honors themselves — is the Daily Point of Light Award from the national Points of Light Foundation. Don and Marilyn Perlyn and their children, Chad, Eric and Amanda, were named Point of Light No. 1109, for May 5.

Created during the administration of President Bush and recently revived, the daily award recognizes "the contributions that volunteers are making toward solving local and national social problems, especially as they relate to young people." It follows several major local, state and national citations for the three youths, including the

J.C. Penney Golden Rule Youth Award and the National Caring Award.

They were nominated for the Point of Light by Rosemarie Stiegele, development director for the Children's Home Society in Fort Lauderdale. The family was selected for 10 years' work helping poor, abused and neglected children, a practice that began when the younger Perlyns were children themselves.

Chad, now 22, was 14 when he founded the "Doc Adopt" program to provide free medical and dental care to poor children. At 13, Eric, who's now 19, formed "Steppin' Up" to give new shoes to needy youngsters. Amanda, now 15, was only 8 when she created "To Have and To Hug," which collects new stuffed animals for underprivileged children. All three organizations are still operating.

Not to be outdone by their

children, Don and Marilyn recently started a South Florida chapter of Operation Smile, which arranges free facial plastic surgery for poor children in developing countries. They are working to arrange several medical missions to South America.

Amanda and her mother are trying to inspire other children to reach out to others, by writing and illustrating "The Biggest and Brightest Light." It's a children's book that tells about Amanda's first project, making and selling holiday crafts to help one of her teachers. Although they have yet to find a publisher, the book has already been endorsed by former heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali.

"The whole idea," said Don Perlyn, explaining the title, "is that the biggest and brightest light is the light within your heart." □