

# Foster's Daily Democrat

## 'Spread the Dough' helping others, cuts down on waste in Durham

By Aaron Sanborn

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DURHAM — A widely successful campaign to feed the hungry has spread to the town, as a University of New Hampshire student is the latest to take part in the "Spread to Dough" program.

The program, started by Stratham resident Melina Higgins in 2005, picks up day-old bread at bakeries and delivers it to homeless shelters, soup kitchens and senior citizens.

UNH sophomore Sophie Gee learned of the program through working with Higgins at a restaurant in New Castle.

"I'm taking an intro to business class and had to do a community service project" Gee said. "I just thought I'd ask her how to get involved and set something up."

Gee said she loved the idea of Higgins' program because it was effective and easy to do. Gee later contacted The Bagelry and asked them if she could pick up bagels from there twice a week and deliver them to the Cross Roads House in Portsmouth.

Gee said the support of the Bagelry made establishing the effort easy.

"They were really happy about it the minute I told them what I wanted to do. They were really excited," she said.

The effort has also caught the attention of Gee's roommate who lives in Manchester and is thinking about doing the same thing in that city.

Gee added that her work with "Spread the Dough" will continue even after her class project is complete.

"I'm definitely going to continue doing it," she said. "It's so easy, it takes only 20 minutes a day and I'm helping other people."

Beyond the new effort in Durham, Higgins said her program is expanding rapidly and also has chapters in Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut and Virginia. A new chapter was also recently opened up in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where 19-year-old Higgins attends Bryn Mawr College.

Higgins said she's been able to connect with youths in others state through Youth Venture, a nonprofit that gave her a \$1,000 grant to support her project. She said other youths are interested in helping because the cause is something they can latch on to.

"It's so simple and people are so eager to help with community service because they're seeing poverty more and more and because it's for people they know," she said.

The idea for "Spread the Dough" started in January 2005 when Higgins was at a bakery and learned day-old bread was thrown away.

"I immediately thought it was ridiculous," she said.

Having been involved in community service since she 8 years old, Higgins devised a better plan and approached Me & Ollie's Cafe in Portsmouth about the idea of her collecting the day-old bread and bringing it to Cross Roads homeless shelter, the Salvation Army soup kitchen and some Seacoast seniors.

She said the bakery was hesitant at first because similar ventures had fizzled out, but Higgins assured them that would not be the case this time around. Higgins and her volunteers haven't let up since.

In five years the program has saved over 30,000 baked goods and recently became a nonprofit, she said.

"I didn't think it would be this big at first, but now I want to make it a national project," she said.