



Teenage Entrepreneurs At Work

Youth Venture Celebrates Ideas In Action

By Jeff Mucciarone jmucciarone@hippopress.com

Youth Venture wants youngsters to “get social with change makers” during its Dinner on the Lawn event next week.

“It’s essentially an opportunity to celebrate youth entrepreneurship and socially responsible business,” said Elizabeth Bandy, event coordinator for Ashoka’s Youth Venture which is an organization working to inspire and invest in teams of young people starting their own sustainable social ventures.

The event targets only socially responsible businesses and entities in New Hampshire and it will highlight youth efforts in particular. It takes place Friday, Aug. 21, from 5 to 8 p.m. on the Statehouse lawn in Concord and includes live music from the Brooks Young Band, plus games and local food. The event is free and open to the public, though donations are encouraged. Green Concord, Boloco restaurant and Stonyfield Farm are sponsoring the event. Gov. John Lynch, who issued a commendation to Youth Venture, is scheduled to speak.

An example of a “youth venture” would be A Birthday Wish, which is an organization donating birthday party packages to families who can’t afford to throw parties for their children. At Souhegan High School in Amherst a group of five freshmen came together in 2006 to create A Birthday Wish. Kristin Leffler, along with five other teammates, pieced the idea together after Youth Venture visited the school. A Birthday Wish will be taking part in Dinner on the Lawn.

“Personally I can remember almost every birthday party I ever had,” Leffler said.

“They were special occasions in my life. My extended family would come. My mom would go over the top, planning games during the party. It was sad for me to think that some kids wouldn’t be able to have a party because parents can’t afford to supply the cake mix and all the supplies of the party. It’s just a necessary part of every child’s life. We really wanted to provide kids with that opportunity. I think it’s a little more personalized than just donating clothes.”

Along with youth initiatives, Youth Venture was looking for companies that give back to the community, such as Real Green Goods in Concord. The company’s business practices and its products are completely environmentally friendly, but it also does community outreach programs. Companies doing that will be highlighted as well.

Dinner on the Lawn focuses on the work of people 12 to 20 years old who have started community-benefiting projects.

“They haven’t had a chance to tell their story,” Bandy said. “Now they can get up and get some recognition.”

A handful of youth venture teams turn their projects into businesses. Bandy said Youth Venture tries to help people begin projects with something they are passionate about. Youth Venture, which is established in 17 countries, also provides seed funding of up to \$1,000, she said.

A Birthday Wish donates birthday party packages to charities in Milford and Nashua. The charities distribute packages to families in need. Packages include personalized themes with supplies, a cake and a card, Leffler said.



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“We’ve made over 80 packages in the first few years,” said Leffler, now a senior. “So 80 kids have been able to have a birthday party.”

Along the way they expanded to include a business portion of A Birthday Wish where the team helps out with birthday parties for families who can afford it. They still offer discounted rates, Leffler said. All the money they raise is put toward the donated packages.

“That’s how we keep ourselves sustained,” Leffler said. “We’re struggling right now with making money. We’re trying to get the word out there more.”

As members prepare for life after high school next year, the Birthday Wish team is looking to pass the business down, likely to their younger siblings, to keep the birthday party packages going. Birthday Wish members include Leffler, Julie Arrowsmith, Annie Bacher, Caroline Hagen, Stephanie Wesson and Mallory Sullivan, all seniors at Souhegan High School and Amherst residents.

Other youth ventures include Little Leaf Lawn Care, which provides discounted landscaping services to all customers and free services to folks who are disabled or financially restricted. Amherst resident Jon Constable, who had been landscaping with his brother for several years, teamed up with his two best friends, Justin Richardson and Tanner Ricciardi, to create the business when they were freshmen in high school.

“I thought this would be a good way to...go forward with this,” Constable said, adding the company does general maintenance, such as mowing, raking, weeding and trimming. “Basically, we do everything a normal landscaping company would do, just a whole lot cheaper.”

The company charges customers \$30 per hour, whereas Constable said professional companies typically start charging customers at \$30 per hour per crew member on the job. The team finds most of its community service jobs through local churches and the school.

“It’s a good feeling once you’re done, and when we tell them the price, they think we’re kidding,” Constable said. Call Little Leaf Lawn Care at 440-9983. Send e-mails to littleleaflawncare@yahoo.com

Spread the Dough is another venture project, to collect day-old bread from area bakeries and donate it to local shelters.