



Lyon named 'Champion of the Year'

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GARDNER -- Over 100 middle- and high-school students met for United Way Youth Venture's regional year-end celebration to share programs they created, launched and led to benefit the community.

Among those honored was a Shirley woman named "Champion of the Year."

The ideas presented at the May 10 event by the 50 teams, representing 15 schools from North Central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire, were as diverse as the students. They ranged from hosting a senior citizen prom by a team from Gardner High School to creating an environmentally-friendly bus in Merrimack, N.H.

One of the teams highlighted during the day-long event was the team from Shirley Middle School and Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School. The "Skaters of Shirley," led by Nick and Kim Day, Sam Robinson and Brandon Taylor, is working to open a skate park at Benjamin Hill Park.

Kathryn Lyon of Shirley, was awarded "Champion of the Year" for leading the way to successfully incorporate United Way's Youth Venture in the Shirley Middle School. She has been a champion since 2003 and launched over 12 teams.

Lyon recently appeared on New England Cable News (NECN) in an interview with Youth Venture spokesperson Kyle Taylor. Accompanying her was Caitlyn Quinones, who has been featured in regional Youth Venture events as an example of what Youth Venture is all about.

United Way Youth Venture is a program in eight school systems throughout the region that provides coaching, resources and seed funding for young people, aged 12 to 20, to create, launch and lead sustainable community-benefiting ventures. The schools include the Leominster public schools, Fitchburg public schools, Shirley Middle School, Ayer High School, Gardner High School, North Middlesex Regional High School, Murdock Middle-High School, Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School and North Central Charter Essential School.

The "Dream it. Do it. World Tour," led by veteran youth venturer and community leader Taylor, will span 11 countries on five continents engaging thousands of youth in person and online via www.genv.net, Youth Venture's new global community Web site for young changemakers. The world tour, which launched April 24 in Washington, D.C., will begin its overseas leg in South America on May 11, the day after the stop in Massachusetts.

United Way Youth Venture is a program of United Way of North Central Massachusetts and Mount Wachusett Community College.