

Trio working to get water to needy

By SUZANNE BATES

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Merrimack High School student Jane Starke was sitting in her child development class a couple of days before Thanksgiving watching a video about people who live without clean drinking water.

"We were learning to be thankful for our food and water," she said.



Starke took away more than gratitude from the film – it also made her want to do something to help the people who were suffering because of contaminated water.

She went home and spoke to her mom, who put her in touch with Nashua resident Ken Grabeau, president of Pure Water for the World, a non-profit working to bring clean water to those without. The organization provides filters, education and medical treatment to people in El Salvador and Honduras.

After talking with Grabeau, Starke was getting excited about the chance she had to actually make a difference so she got in touch with some friends she knew could help.

The three-woman team now includes Noelle Joubert, a senior at MHS, and Melia Robinson, a junior at MHS. Joubert is in charge of accounting for Pure Water Vending – the name they gave to their project – and Robinson is in charge of marketing.

"Jane called me and immediately I could tell how passionate she was," said Robinson.

The trio decided to try to sell water to raise money to provide clean water to those in need – and they are able to rattle off the statistics that urge them to help as many people as possible.

They know 6,000 children die each day from drinking contaminated water – that's one every 15 seconds, said Starke. And they know 1.7 billion people worldwide do not have access to clean, safe drinking water.

Starke credits Grabeau with helping them get their idea off the ground. He offered to pay for a vending machine, at a cost of \$4,000, which the girls will fill with water.

The vending machine will be placed in Broadway Bound Performing Arts Center in Merrimack, where Joubert works and Starke dances. Owner Jennifer DeFelice said she was more than happy to help when she found out about the project.

"They have huge hearts," she said. "They're all really good kids. It's so nice that they want to give back."

The girls plan to use one-third of the money they raise to buy filters from Pure Water for the World, one-third to re-stock the machine and one-third to save for more vending machines.

They were recently awarded a \$1,000 grant by United Way-Youth Venture, a program to inspire teens to change the world. The girls made a presentation to a panel about their idea and were selected to receive the seed money.

They said they plan to use that money to buy wagons and coolers so they can go to local fairs and summer events to sell water. They also plan to make display boards and posters to educate more people about the problem.

Robinson works with the MHS Interact Club – the high school equivalent of Rotary International, another group helping with the project – and plans to tap into volunteers and funds through that group as well.

They are already planning a bake sell for Earth Day, which is on April 22.

In the future the girls hope to bring other students into the venture, but for now they are thrilled to see their efforts begin to take off.

"When I first started thinking about it I thought, 'Well, one person can't do anything,' said Starke. "But hey, it turns out they can."

Donations to Pure Water Vending can be sent to P.O. Box 1371, Merrimack, NH, 03054.

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