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Westwood girls give grants to Central Texas

LAURI ZACHRY

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What began as a volunteer organization with 11 Central Texas high school girls as members has blossomed to 40 girls with an increasing involvement.

Last year, students involved with Girls Giving Grants built the organization from the ground up by naming, branding and launching the organization's Web site and learning about the grant-writing process. The slogan for Girls Giving Grants is "Changing the Face of Giving." This year, the girls have created five separate committees to further review the grant applications and have installed officers for the upcoming grant cycles, said Dina Mavridis, Girls Giving Grants director.

Girls Giving Grants officers for the 2007-08 school year and their respective schools are: President Claire Powers (St Stephens Episcopal School); Vice President Lauren Taylor (Westwood High); Secretary Sarah Land (Westwood High); Recruiting Chair Anne Mulvaney (Westwood High) and Social Chair Kelsey Hughen (Westwood High) The officers will participate in an upcoming officers retreat Oct. 13.

"This has been great watching these girls grow into young, professional women of the future," Mavridis said. "This is the only opportunity in Austin girls this age have to run with their own money through a grant-giving program. The decisions these girls make really impact the community."

Anne and Claire have both been active members of Girls Giving Grants for two years. Claire became involved with the organization because her mother, Rebecca, is the founder of Impact Austin, parent organization of Girls Giving Grants. Impact Austin began four years ago.

"This definitely opens your eyes to the nonprofit organizations in Austin," Claire said. "Pulling your resources together like your time and money can really make a big impact. It's such an amazing feeling knowing that you are helping people."

Anne learned of Girls Giving Grants through one of her friends who attended Westwood.

The most exciting aspect of it for me was that we got to pull together to help some part of the youth, Anne said. "Also, I feel like it is really beneficial to learn about different nonprofit organizations and the large need of money in the Austin area."

In addition to Girls Giving Grants, Anne participates as a Westwood Sun Dancer, as a member of the school's National Honor Society and in the school's Helping Our Peers Excel mentoring program. She is also an active participant in Girl Scouts. She plans to attend the University of Texas in Austin after graduation and possibly pursue a career in education.

Claire is active in several activities at St. Stephen's which includes volunteering with Stephen's Kids, in which high school students mentor elementary students once a month. After attending a site visit through Girls Giving Grants at the Austin Children's Shelter, Claire began volunteering once a month for the organization. After graduation, she plans to attend Duke or Vanderbilt University and pursue a career in engineering. However, she plans to continue the volunteer efforts Girls Giving Grants has instilled in her.

Anne also plans to continue her involvement volunteering with the nonprofit sector.

"Girls Giving Grants really has made an impact on my life and it has made me realize how fortunate I am to have the opportunities to do things for myself, whereas other young adults around Austin don't have the opportunities I do," Anne said. "Also, I have made numerous friends through this program that I would not have otherwise known. We don't just review applications, we also have a good time getting to know each other playing games and doing other activities."

The membership drive deadline for the Girls Giving Grants Class of 2008 is in October. Membership requirements are females in eighth through 12th grade must contribute \$100, which is combined with other members' donations to form the grant, and must commit two hours a week and two Sundays a month to the organization.

For more information on Girls Giving Grants or to join the organization, visit girlsgivinggrants.org.

Contact Lauri Zachry at 255-5827 or by e-mail at education@rleader.com.