

Next generation of Asheville girls learns about women helping women



Written by

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ASHEVILLE — Philanthropy, in Latin, means love of humanity.

The young women enrolled at Hanger Hall School for Girls live it when they volunteer as a group or on their own. On Monday, however, the students got a taste of the empowerment volunteerism promotes from Women for Women giving circle members Beth Ellers and Mardi Letson.

"We spend three years talking about empowering the emerging woman," said Catherine McClain, the head of school. "What I try to emphasize with the girls are two things: One, be good stewards of your community, of giving back, what that looks like; and, two, how they can give back."

The discussion Monday was one in a series at the school related to the giving circle and its annual luncheon, which will feature

philanthropist Jennifer Buffett. Buffett, co-chairwoman and president of the NoVo Foundation, is married to Peter Buffett, son of billionaire Warren Buffett.

The school, one of the sponsors of the Power of the Purse luncheon Monday at the Expo Center at the Crowne Plaza Resort, partnered with a handful of parents to purchase tickets for 25 eighth-graders to attend the luncheon so the 13-year-olds would see philanthropy in action.

"We (women's giving circle) are really trying to look at what's going to have the biggest impact, what's going to make the biggest difference," Ellers said.

And the students showed interest in the discussion, which centered on the challenges women face in trying to earn a living wage. The young women were quick to pick up the thread, giving answers ranging from access to affordable child care to lacking job skills and education to gender discrimination.

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"This really has a big impact on so many women and children in our area," Ellers told the roomful of girls. "Economic self-sufficiency — there are very different ways to achieve that, and so we give out a whole different variety of grants."

Each member of the giving circle pledges \$1,100 a year for three years. This year, the group will distribute \$270,000 in grants.

The grants, which typically range from \$15,000 to \$100,000, will be awarded at the luncheon Monday.

Although the group received 44 proposals this year, only 12 nonprofits were invited to apply and a committee of women visited seven work sites.

From 2006-09, more than 7,500 women have benefited from programs that have received grants from the women's giving circle. Previous recipients include OnTrack Financial Education and Counseling; REACH in Cherokee and Jackson counties, which serves victims of domestic abuse or sexual violence; and the YWCA in Asheville.

If you go

Community leader and philanthropist Jennifer Buffett will speak at the seventh annual Power of the Purse luncheon Monday at the Expo Center at the Crowne Plaza Resort. The event benefits The Women's Fund of the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, which will announce \$270,000 in grants from the Women for Women giving circle. Jennifer Buffett's husband, Peter Buffett, is the son of Susan and Warren Buffett, who bequeathed Jennifer and Peter a small charitable fund. Tickets are \$50, or \$125 for a patron ticket; no tickets at the door. Learn more at www.cfwnc.org.

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