

# 'Giving circle' teaches students about stewardship

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When Presentation Academy launched its capital campaign, Tower Vision, in 2006, Joetta Davis, a member of the school's alumnae board, began to consider the characteristics unique to female donors.

"I kept thinking there's a Ph.D. in there on the psychology of women's giving," said Davis in a recent interview.

Davis, a member of Presentation's class of 1973, said that as women have gained greater earning power they have also gained a greater philanthropic opportunity. Schools such as Presentation

## Seniors at Presentation raised funds, awarded grants to school community

that serve women and rely upon alumnae to support its efforts, she noted, are in a unique situation when it comes to giving.

About a year after the \$5 million campaign began, Davis attended a workshop that addressed women and giving. What she learned affirmed what her intuition suspected.

Traditional fundraising tends to target the competitive nature of the individual by singling out those who give the most and giving

awards to those who contribute a great deal, Davis noted. That's all fine, as far as Davis is concerned, but it's incomplete as it regards female donors.

Women, she believes, are more apt to give when asked to do so as part of a group.

"It's not that women aren't competitive, but we are also collaborative," she explained. "When we climb a mountain, we want to help everyone get to the top, too. While we might like recognition, we prefer connections" with

other people.

"Of course," she noted, "the school began with the collaborative efforts of a group of women, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth."

So the question Davis and other fundraisers have asked is this: How do we form young women as philanthropists? One idea she learned is called a giving circle, which Davis established last fall with Presentation's senior class, the graduates of 2009.

She challenged the seniors to give \$1 a month for nine months (roughly the duration of the school year). With

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Record Photo by Marnie McAllister

Gwen Gottlieb, a 2009 graduate of Presentation Academy, packed playground equipment to be given to children in Kenya.

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67 seniors, they could potentially raise \$603. In addition, a group of alumnae pledged to match the contribution of each student who participated, lifting their fundraising goal to \$1,206.

As an added bonus, if all 67 seniors fully participated in the fund-raiser, alumnae would give an additional 50 percent per student (\$4.50). The total potential goal came to \$1,507.50.

"A giving circle allows you to pool minimal resources," said Davis. "It allows individuals to pool their dollars for their donations to have a greater impact."

Davis said students weren't required to take part, but all 67 signed up.

By the end of the school year, "they had 100 percent participation," said Davis. "In fundraising, 100 percent participation is almost unheard of."

Davis said she met with the students each month, sometimes a couple of times a month, to chat with them at lunch and collect their contributions.

"They helped each other out," she said. "Everyone had to be involved in it. But some people didn't have \$1. So, some girls would bring in an extra dollar and say, 'Let this be for someone who is struggling.'"

In February, when it seemed clear that the students would reach their goal, Davis said she and the students created a \$1,500 grant to be awarded to a project or school department that would benefit the school community.

The school staff was invited to submit proposals for the grants. And they did so with enthusiasm, said Davis. The stu-

dents received nine proposals. Requests ranged from funding for a theater workshop to new library books to new sight-reading books for the chorus.

After the proposals were submitted April 17, seniors took a week to deliberate.

"The professionalism with which they (the faculty and staff) prepared the grants indicated they were treating the students as an adult giving body," said Davis. "And they (the students) pored over the proposals very, very carefully. That says a lot about them, and it says a lot about the faculty and staff who submitted" grant proposals.

Gwen Gottlieb, a 2009 graduate of Presentation and a member of the giving circle, said Davis "got us all pumped up."

"She was the spirit behind the whole thing," said Gottlieb, noting that Davis gave the students a sense that what they were doing was important.

"It wasn't a lot of money we gave up, but when we put it together we got to fund two projects," she said. "It really showed us a lot about" philanthropy and the potential of collaboration.

Members of the giving circle funded two proposals with the money they raised. First, they gave \$450 to a group of students and alumnae who left for Kenya June 13. The money will cover the cost of materials the group needs to build a playground at an orphanage in Rongo, Kenya.

And the giving circle funded the purchase of a new potter's wheel for Presentation's art department.

The cost of the two proposals was a bit over budget, so the giving circle came up with an additional \$44.

Garv Householder, a Presen-

tation social studies teacher, coordinated the trip to Kenya through Hearts4Kenya, and he wrote the proposal for the playground funds.

When the giving circle announced it would finance the playground, "it brought tears to my eyes," said Householder. "I felt my students had looked at the world, stepped up, taken money from their pockets and made a difference. I'm very proud of them."

"There are some kids who have nothing, and now they're going to have a playground," he noted. "This orphanage is out in the middle of nowhere. They feel left behind by the world."

"If I had to ask members of this class (of 2009), 'What is your goal in life?' I would probably get a consensus: 'I want to make a difference in the world,'" Householder said. "I think they will feel they've made a difference. It is a way of giving, helping and encouraging the Kenyans to realize there are people out there who care."

Davis said she hopes to continue the giving circle with future classes and noted the process had several positive side effects on the class of 2009.

"It increased their knowledge of the organization," Davis noted. The students "learned about the power of pooling resources for a common cause, about Presentation's needs and about the philanthropic role of women."

"It was a pleasure to work with them," she added. "I was blown away by their fidelity to the project."

