



# Community Matters

## Doing Good in Your Community



Did you know there is a group of Guilford teenagers who are always there for you? That's right! This dedicated bunch is responsible for over \$100,000 in contributions to the community over the past ten years. And they just keep on going. Who are they? They are the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) – high school students/philanthropists (sophomores to seniors) who raise funds and award grants to local organizations in need.

### The Beginnings

Ten years ago, the Board Chair of The Guilford Foundation, Tim Geelen, and the Guilford High School (GHS) Interact Advisor, Al Jacobs, collaborated on an idea to encourage youth philanthropy. The Youth Advisory Group of the Guilford Foundation (TGF) was established and challenged to fundraise \$5000 which would then be matched by TGF for a total of \$10,000 to be used to fund grants to local organizations in need of such funding to benefit programs for our youth. It was a resounding success as the YAG easily raised the funds – that year and year after year.



### How It All Works

Each YAG member must also be a member in good standing of the GHS Interact Club. They elect their own officers and meet biweekly during the school year. The students run their own meeting with adult advisors present to offer support/guidance as needed. The YAG not only raises funds but also reviews grants for funding consideration. “The mission of the group is to foster efforts and relationships that empower and strengthen the positive values Guilford youth contribute to the community,” says YAG chair, Pat DeChiara. “All grant applications are reviewed by the students with this mission in mind.”

For example, new this year was a grant awarded to the Guilford Land Trust to improve trail markings as trail use by families this past year had increased significantly due to



the pandemic. As DeChiara explains, there are often more grant applications than can be funded so the students must discuss and advocate for the grants they deem deserving of support. “This is a great learning experience for them as decisions can be difficult when funds are limited,” notes DeChiara. The YAG grant deadline is April 1.



The funds for the grants arise from the hard work of the YAG students. Fundraising events are planned throughout the year. These include car washes, pancake breakfasts, tag sales, Guilford Fair poster and popcorn sales, etc. DeChiara's favorite is the annual Luminaria on the Green. “It's such a beautiful sight and brings such joy to everyone to be able to share a sweet thought or celebrate a loved one with

a light.” The YAG start selling the luminaria during the month of November.

### Generosity and Gratitude

The Guilford community has been amazingly supportive of the YAG's endeavors to enhance opportunities for our youth. This is evident in generosity with respect to the fundraisers and the annual appeal. Here are just a couple of comments from those who have been provided support via YAG grants:

We are thrilled to receive support from the Guilford Foundation Youth Advisory Group! This validation of our program is so vital to our success!

We were able to provide a full scholarship because of the funds awarded. We are so thankful for the continued support!

### Growth and Lasting Impacts

With 71 grants totaling \$108,000 over 10 years, the YAG has earned the confidence of TGF so well that they recently were charged with the additional responsibility to oversee grants from Guilford Institute funds of over \$10,000 per year which help support GHS needs that fall outside of the budget.

YAG is life changing – for its members and the community. Many former YAG members stay in touch via our Facebook group and often participate in our various fundraising activities when they are home from college. “It is very gratifying to see students who may have started out a little shy or reticent and watching them develop into more confident speakers with well-conceived ideas and ambitions for their community,” underscores DeChiara. “Our hope is that they will continue to grow and think beyond themselves as they go forward to be future leaders we can all be proud of.”

