

Group inspires students to continue education



COURTESY PHOTO

This year's Community Scholarship award winners are, from left: Justina Lafreniere of Antrim; Diana Lavoie, Peterborough; Morgan Boutwell, Peterborough; presenter Priscilla Coffill and Joe Hayes, ConVal Guidance Department.

Community Scholarships given to participants

By JOAN GEARY

Special to

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In 2006, a small group of community members founded ConVal Community Scholarship Foundation to inspire disadvantaged high school students to complete high school and pursue postsecondary education.

In December of that year, in collaboration with ConVal High School, the group launched its first initiative, pledging \$100 scholarships for higher education to 10 at-risk high school students, who were nominated by a committee of school personnel.

Among them was Priscilla Coffill.

Since childhood, she'd dreamed of becoming a nurse, but faced formidable financial obstacles to turn that vision to reality. Her single-parent mother couldn't afford college tuition, and her father, who had remarried, declined to contribute to the costs of her higher education.

Along with the nine other students, she competed for additional commitments, which were based not on academics, but by demonstrating personal potential and dedication to overcome personal or financial hardships to individual educational goals.

Quickly, the field of 10 narrowed to six. In May 2007 three winners were each awarded college scholarships of \$5,000; 50 percent of tu-

ition costs for a two-year program in the New Hampshire Community College system.

Coffill did not receive a major scholarship; but as a runner-up was awarded a \$500 grant toward her college tuition. Still, she found her experience rewarding.

"I ended up with a smaller amount," she said, "but it felt so good just being nominated for the program."

The foundation's goal is not to award scholarships. It's to inspire students who face serious challenges to finish high school and to successfully move on to higher education. To that end, volunteer mentors keep in touch with award winners; helping them make the transition from high school to post-

secondary institutions, and monitoring their progress there.

Coffill did so well in her first semester of a two-year nursing associate degree program at New Hampshire Technical Institute in Concord that the foundation decided to increase her grant by an additional \$500 per semester through her May 2009 graduation.

Beyond that, the group negotiated with Monadnock Community Hospital, who matched the supplemental grant and also interviewed Coffill as a prospective future employee.

"It's made such a huge difference," she said. "I had a small federal loan, and thought I could work while going to school. But, my course load is so demanding, I don't have much time to work."

"This money makes such a difference. It's money I don't have to worry about coming up with now," Coffill said. "I'm so unbelievably grateful that I was able to be involved with this program."

But, hers is not the only success story from the Class of 2007. Out of the three major award winners, two already have received offers of employment while one is moving on to complete a four-year college degree program.

This past academic year, 12 new students at ConVal were selected for program participation. Because of rising tuition costs, each student initially received a \$250 scholarship pledge; and subsequently competed for further commitments. In June 2008, Coffill returned to her high school alma mater to present \$5,800 scholar-



making a difference

Nonprofits and people in the Monadnock region

ships to three recipients: Justina Lafreniere of Antrim; Diana Lavoie of Peterborough; and Morgan Boutwell of Peterborough.

Future progress of award winners again will be monitored. The foundation, which is funded mainly by private donations, welcomes contributions by community members.

"We're making a difference because we select kids whose chances of going beyond high school are severely limited," said John Vance, board president. "And, as evidenced by the Class of 2007, the kids we're giving these awards to are succeeding."

"We hope by helping a few to give confidence and hope to others so that they can do the same," he said.

"*Making a Difference, Nonprofits and people in the Monadnock region,*" is a feature that will run every other week, in collaboration with *Giving Monadnock*, which seeks to raise awareness of the role of nonprofit agencies in the Monadnock region.

For more information, e-mail info@givingmonadnock.org or call 357-7171.

The Nonprofit

ConVal Community Scholarship Foundation
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The Essentials

Board president:
John Vance
Founded: 2006
Service area: ConVal Re-

gional School District

Annual budget: \$45,000;
100 percent from contributions; no paid staff, 17 volunteers

Mission

To inspire confidence and hope with community support to help more students in the ConVal region to achieve their potential.

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