

Group raises money for education

A few years ago, in the check-out aisle of his local grocery store, Peterborough resident John Vance overheard a teenage cashier and a bag-boy discuss plans to drop out of high school. Dismayed by the conversation, the retired publishing executive rallied a small group of community members. Together, in 2006, they founded Conval Community Scholarship Foundation Dollars for Scholars. It's an incentive program to motivate disadvantaged high school seniors to complete high school and pursue postsecondary education.

Vance sums up the goal like this: "We want to inspire."

In partnership with Conval High School, the group launched its first initiative last academic year, pledging \$100 scholarships for higher education to 10 at-risk students who were nominated by a committee of school administrators, guidance counselors and other personnel. Students competed for additional commitments, based not on academic achievement, but by overcoming financial or personal obstacles to achieve their educational goals and display personal potential.

"The students selected have to meet several criteria," said Joe Hayes, Conval's guidance department director. "They have to have a personal and/or financial hardship. They have to be demonstrating a goal orientation, and be working on improving self. They have to be overcoming their adversity. And persistence is very important."

Within months, the field of 10 narrowed to six. In May, three win-

ners were awarded \$5,000 college scholarships; the sum represented half the tuition costs for a two year program in the New Hampshire Community College system.

Among the winners was Alycia Mudrack, a former high school drop-out.

"Right into junior year, I dropped out of school. I didn't think I was going to go anywhere. I'd lost everything," she said. "Then, I went back to school to finish junior and senior year. I didn't know if I'd be accepted to any college. And, even

if I were, my parents couldn't afford it."

"Then, in the middle of senior year, I was nominated for the awards program," she said. "I was happy even to get the smallest amount. It pushed me a little bit more to try. Things just kept happening. They kept upping the amount. Then, just before graduation, I got the news that I was a scholarship winner."

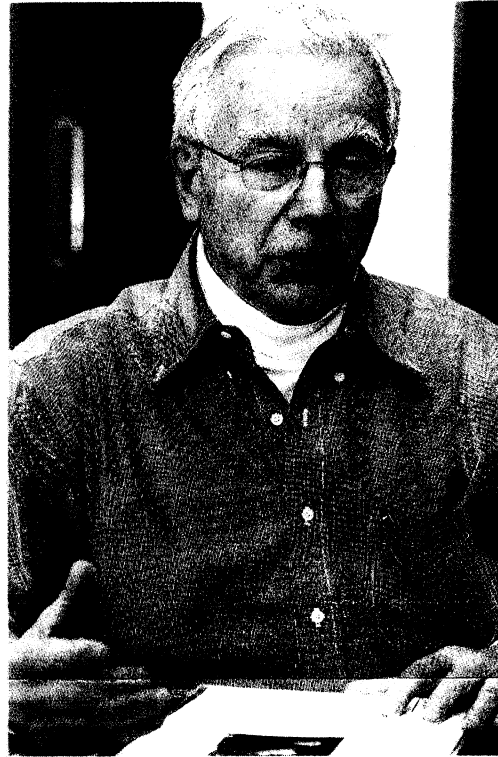
Today, she's on the dean's list at Hesser College in Nashua, where

she'll soon complete her associate's degree in criminal justice. She plans to pursue a career in law enforcement or forensic science, and she credits the nonprofit for her academic success.

"The program changed my life," she said. "It's great. I never expected to do something like this. It made me push more. It made a very big difference. It showed me that I had hope."

Beyond helping students, the nonprofit also aids parents with limited financial resources.

"Alycia never liked school, she



STEVE HOOPER / Sentinel Source

John Vance, board president of the Conval Community Scholarship Foundation Dollars for Scholars.

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— **ALYCIA MUDRACK, HESSER COLLEGE**

The agency

Conval Community Scholarship Foundation Dollars for Scholars

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The particulars

Board president: John F. Vance

Founded: 2006

Service area: Conval Regional School District; serves 12 individuals annually

Annual budget: \$45,000; 90 percent from contributions, 10 percent from grants; 102 individual donors in the past 12 months

Staff: no paid staff, 1 volunteer

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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struggled academically," said her mother, Pam Lechluder, a Peterborough resident and bank teller. "For the longest time, all we heard was 'I hate school. I can't wait to be done with school.' Then partway through her senior year, suddenly she wanted to go to college. I didn't know what to do."

"Financially, neither her father, who lives in Keene, or I could help her," she said. "There's no way we could have gotten her this far. When she won the scholarship, it made such an immense difference. It's unbelievable that they've helped people like me who can't afford to send their daughter to college."

Recently a dozen new Conval

High School seniors were nominated for this year's program, in which winners will receive \$5,800 scholarships that reflect increased tuition costs. Volunteer mentors will monitor final scholarship recipients throughout their postsecondary education experience.

"This isn't about scholarship," said Vance. "It's to invoke confidence and to get these kids to stay in school. The idea is to prevent drop-outs; to give hope and confidence to kids who have little hope in postsecondary education."

The nonprofit, funded mainly by private donations, welcomes individual contributions.

~ Joan Gear

"Making a Difference," a weekly feature, is a collaborative project of The Keene Sentinel and Giving Monadnock, which seeks to raise public awareness of the role of nonprofit agencies in the Monadnock Region. For more information, e-mail info@givingmonadnock.org or call 357-7171.