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Rotary awards grants to local organizations

By LINDA LEAVITT

At its weekly luncheon Tuesday, Jan. 20, at Moscato's, Scarsdale Rotary awarded \$6,000 in grants to local organizations that exemplify the club's motto, "Service above self": Afya Foundation, TAP, Make-A-Wish Foundation and Girls Inc. Continuing to receive Rotary support are the SAT tutoring service Let's Get Ready, and Rotary Youth leadership awards.

Several other organizations receive annual support from the club: the Scarsdale Foundation, Scarsdale § Edgemont Family Counseling Service, Scarsdale Volunteer Ambulance Corps, Lakota Children's Enrichment and the Greenburgh Nature Center. The club awarded a total of \$29,000 last year to grant recipients as well as to the Haitian Water Project and Children's Village.

"With our grants program we bring some tangible reality to our fundraising and activity efforts and see the benefits of our work throughout the year," said Daniel Gerardi, president of Scarsdale Rotary. Most of the money comes from the club's annual fundraiser, a wine tasting party and auction to be held at the Scarsdale Woman's Club March 12.

Five grant recipients were at the luncheon Jan. 20 to thank Rotary and describe their work.

Danielle Butin, a distinguished alumna of Scarsdale High School and the founder of Afya, said her organization, which collects medical supplies and equipment and sends them to countries in need, has been busy responding to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. On the Martin Luther King holiday, she had several groups of young people packing supplies at Afya's Yonkers warehouse — an activity that has become traditional on that day.

Butin said the Rotary grant



Margaret Goldberg, Thomas Cain of Rotary, Danielle Butin of the Afya Foundation, Daniel Gerardi, Rotary Club president; Lisa Tretler of TAP, Thomas Conklin of Make-A-Wish, Jane Veron (TAP) and Nicole Loesser of Girls Inc.

would enable Afya to send 1,000 birth kits to Ghana. She explained that western efforts to encourage African women to go to hospitals to give birth have had an unintended consequence: Since the hospitals are few and far between, women set out walking when they are in the end stages of labor and many have died giving birth on the road.

In the past year Afya launched a maternal health initiative, Wazazi, to reduce maternal and infant mortality. It focuses on supporting traditional birth attendants in the villages with midwife training and modern medical equipment, including birth kits, to facilitate safer and more hygienic delivery practices. Studies show that women and newborns who have access to these kits are far less likely to develop delivery-related complications and/or infections.

Jane Veron and Lisa Tretler told the club about their efforts to boost local businesses through their 2-year-old organization The Acceleration Project (TAP). "Our mission is very much

aligned with Rotarian beliefs," said Veron. Scarsdale women who are former consultants and financial professionals are trying to help the owners of small businesses in the village to realize their growth potential. TAP also works with the village to improve parking options downtown for shoppers, Veron said.

Tretler noted that "local business owners have never before faced such a challenge to their vitality" in the form of competition from big box stores and the Internet. Although it often takes multiple exposures, she said "business owners are taking ownership" of the problem and "finding ways to work together," she said.

Noting that his business is one that has especially keen competition from big box stores, Rotarian Robert Zohn, owner of Value Electronics on Popham Road, said he is "very grateful" to TAP for surveying business owners and customers and he loves TAP's "Shop the 'Dale" campaign.

Another Rotarian observed that supporting local businesses is a matter of "self-preservation" for

Scarsdale residents since shortfalls on business taxes will have to be made up by homeowners.

Thomas Conklin told the Rotarians that the Make-A-Wish Foundation was started in 1980 to provide a positive experience for a 7-year-old boy who had leukemia and more than anything wanted to be a state trooper. Neighbors, among them a trooper, raised money to make a pint-sized uniform for the boy and enabled him to ride in a helicopter and in a trooper's car. He was sworn in as an officer and received his "wings" shortly before he died.

The men who helped the boy realize his dream were inspired to start the organization to make wishes come true for other critically ill children. Today there are more than 60 chapters of the Make-A-Wish Foundation — 38 in other countries. "We're now working on 160 wishes," Conklin said. A popular one is going to Disney. If that wish is granted, the whole family goes.

Nicole Loesser, the director of Girls Inc., said the organization represents a "rebranding of Girls' Clubs" to foster positive images of girls and help them develop leadership skills. Noting that "one in five girls experiences sexual assault while in middle and high school," Loesser said the club teaches girls to advocate for themselves in social justice and health issues. Girls Inc. offers workshops in managing money, self-defense, media literacy and sexual health.

The Rotary grant will fund a workshop on preparing for college. "A lot of [club members] are the first in their families to go," Loesser said. "They need help with their applications and financial aid."

For more information on Rotary and its grant program, go to www.scarsdalerotary.org.