

Young Philanthropy

Young enough to try
and bright enough to triumph

BY ISA CRAWFORD WATSON



Growing up, Kendall Ronzano loved to build extraordinary structures out of K'NEX building sets. She also lit a fire in her mother's stove with a blow torch, and blew up the microwave by experimenting with adhesives and popcorn.

By the time she was 10 years old, she vowed she would learn how to build a house before graduating from high school. And, driving daily past the local homeless shelter and people shivering under newspaper or digging in dumpsters as she departed her Santa Cruz home en route to York private high school in Monterey, she confirmed her commitment to build a home and shelter a family from the streets.

Now closing in on the spring of her senior year, as she plays year-round power volleyball and prepares her college applications, Ronzano, 17, is close to completing her first house.

Never mind that she bought the plans for the house online from Tumbleweed Tiny House Company. Or that it will be 117 sq. ft. plus 50 sq. ft. of loft space. Or that it sits on a trailer to be towed by a truck. The structure, with its bathroom, bedroom, kitchen and loft, is a bona fide house that can and will sleep two to four people.

"I've always thought it would be financially smart to know how a house works," Ronzano says, "so I could fix anything on my own, without waiting for a plumber or electrician. If the toilet breaks, I won't freak out. And if natural disaster strikes, I'll have tools under my belt, literally and figuratively, to take care of things."

But when the tsunami hit Japan during her sophomore year, and she imagined waves rushing over the agricultural fields of Watsonville, were such a disaster to hit home. "I had an epiphany," she says, "that I could actually do something to help my community by building this house and giving it to someone who needs it."

For her efforts and philanthropic spirit, Ronzano was recently awarded "Most Philanthropic Youth of the Year" at the National Philanthropy Day luncheon, hosted by the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) and Development Executives Network (DEN).

We are delighted," says Head of School Chuck Harmon, "that Kendall has joined a long list of York students who have been recognized as leaders in local philanthropy. She is a great example of how diligence, determination, and dedication yield success. In addition to being a great student, she is the student technology officer at York, as well as an accomplished athlete – captain of York's volleyball team. Kendall exemplifies an important value of our school: the importance of

giving back to your community."

Once she completes her house, Ronzano, who has fundraised \$10,000 of the \$15,000 cost of the house, plans to assemble a committee to establish criteria by which to select a family in need. Next, she will embark on her second house and train a team of high school students to see it to completion while she heads off to college.

Ronzano is one of many young philanthropists in the 831 who warrant recognition for service to their local community.

Amanda Nansel-Giuliano considers her life privileged. The local high school senior, 17, who was raised on the Monterey Peninsula by two devoted parents in a context of faith and family, is set to graduate from the private Santa Catalina School this spring, and pursue a college education in theater arts and neuroscience. Fascinated by why things work and the technical aspects of everything, she sees the potential for interaction between her chosen fields.

Nansel-Giuliano also is focused on the perspective fostered in her by privilege, which is not about entitlement but obligation to community. Which is why, during the past two years, she has accumulated more than 400 hours of volunteer service as a member of the Junior Auxiliary at Community Hospital.

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"A premise I have found to be established both in moral principle and in experience," she says, "is that it is impossible to live well alone. All are called to live in community. We survive and we thrive by relying upon each other, by carrying one another's burdens and by restoring peace."

Nansel-Giuliano began volunteering at the hospital as a way to explore her sense of self through her connections to others, and to develop her understanding of herself as a philanthropic person, someone who contributes to life beyond her own.

"Seeing people benefit from my volunteer work," she says, "is something that helps fulfill me as a person. I had an experience where I talked with a patient, an elderly gentleman, for 45 minutes, listening to him talk about his life. I not only found him interesting, but I knew I was letting him know he mattered. Here was this person who was not well, alone in his bed and his illness, but not alone."

Nansel-Giuliano, who has volunteered in nutrition services, at the

for her age, Amanda's positive attitude and her special demeanor serve as an excellent example to her peers," says Debra Baker, director of Campus Ministry. "Amanda is clear about her values and takes a stand for her beliefs. She learns from the situations she encounters and knows how to make adjustments in her study skills to achieve the goals she has for herself. I'm impressed with how Amanda balances her academics with all the extracurricular activities she participates in.

Although Will Wiltschko, 21, has graduated from Monterey Peninsula College and moved on to his first semester at UCLA, the political science and data analysis major has left much behind at his former campus. In the wake of ongoing budget cuts that sacrificed student support programs, last year, Wiltschko and pal Travis Johnson, who is now studying engineering at San Jose State, decided to find a way for students to help students.

The result is Scholars for Excellence and Advancement (SEA), a student-run club through which student scholars form study groups through which to help one another through school.

"Carsbia Anderson, vice president of student services, told me about Uri Treisman study groups, which focus on excellence, collaborative learning and faculty sponsorship to significantly improve student performance in class," says Wiltschko, "and we knew we could create a program at MPC. Our study groups go beyond course subjects to create camaraderie and support, which increases productivity and gets learning done. Travis led study groups in engineering, I held them for political science and English, and another student did it to the highest levels of math."

After Wiltschko worked with Johnson, a first-generation college student, on his scholarship applications, the pair thought, why not create workshops for scholarship and university entrance applications? Wiltschko held a workshop for UC applications and says every student who attended, achieved acceptance to the UC campus of their choice.

When Wiltschko rose to accept the "Outstanding Philanthropic Young Adult" at National Philanthropy Day in November 2012, he acknowledged Johnson and his other SEA mentors for their contribution to the success of the program.

"Will took the initiative to create the SEA club on the MPC campus when he learned that the Academic Support Center had limited funds to provide tutorial assistance and would not be able to help as many students in 2011-12," says faculty advisor Lynn Iwamoto. "Will approached an MPC faculty member and made his pitch to start the club. He recruited tutors for the program, organized the study groups, and even coordinated the club's fundraising activities which generated \$1,100 for student scholarships."

"Prior to transferring to UCLA this fall, Will crafted the club's guidelines to help future SEA club leaders, and recruited MPC students to serve as SEA club officers in the coming year in order to keep the club working toward its common goal of providing academic support for fellow students."

The young, wrote the late Pearl S. Buck, do not know enough to be prudent and, therefore, they attempt the impossible – and achieve it, generation after generation.



TOP > Amanda Nansel-Giuliano at CHOMP (Community Hospital of Monterey Peninsula).



Kendall Ronzano at her construction site with her tools.

front reception desk and, currently, in the ER at Community Hospital, is now president of the Junior Auxiliary. In addition to her volunteer services, she attends every recruitment and orientation meeting, interviews and trains young volunteers, and contributes to Currents, the Auxiliary magazine.

"The work I do at the hospital is not about my title as president," she says, "but what I'm able to achieve with others. When we hear that the hospital would not be able to run without its volunteers, we understand that our help is both needed and appreciated. We do this because we believe in our community and we want it to work, to function together to the benefit of everyone."

Nansel-Giuliano also has invested in her philanthropic work through Santa Catalina, where she participates in community service, such as spending time with residents at nearby Ave Maria Convalescent Hospital, through her Peace & Justice Club.

"To me, she shines in all that she does. Mature