

Philanthropically Inclined

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The newly-formed Society of Young Philanthropists seeks to unite young professionals with goals of social awareness and charity.

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A newly-formed group of twenty-somethings, who call themselves The Society of Young Philanthropists (SYP), was founded on a mission to inspire local youth to contribute to society.

The Society of Young Philanthropists started in December 2004 as a vision of a few close friends in Beverly Hills looking for a unique--and fun--way to give back to their community. The organization's president and founder, Elishia Shokrian, grew up in a family of philanthropists and after going to numerous charity events, had a sense of what would be attractive to young people like herself.

"I thought with all the resources that a lot of people like me have available, our education and the professions that we're in [now], we can contribute and we should contribute. It shouldn't just be up to our parents' generation to do that," Shokrian said.

Shokrian graduated from Cornell University in 2004 with a degree from the College of Hotel Administration. She knew that charity did not just mean giving money, but rather it could be as simple and effective as a "night out" to benefit a worthy cause.

"Our whole mission and goal is to make philanthropy attractive by throwing events and making them fun," Shokrian said. "The event would be just like what [young] people do when they go out on a Saturday night, but instead of spending a hundred dollars for the night, that money would go to charity."

Since the group started five months ago, they have been working towards making their society debut with their first annual charity fundraiser set for May 14. Shokrian volunteered her Beverly Hills home as a venue for the organization's first event and others have offered their professional expertise in public relations, entertainment or hospitality.

The venue opportunity and Shokrian's desire to hold an event that would benefit charity is what she said sparked the brainstorming for SYP's purpose. The organization is centered around planning events that will allow these young professionals to contribute their resources to charitable causes, which they hope will ignite a greater commitment to philanthropy among the next generation.

SYP currently has 22 committee members, who have been the steering force behind the planning and organization of their debut event. Within the first few months the steer

committee was formed mostly by word-of-mouth and by members networking with their peers.

Founding Committee member and Director of PR Gabe Halimi ('00) said a majority of their upcoming event was put together by members getting sponsorships from the community or using their professional, social and educational resources to get donations for food, entertainment and the raffle.

“One way to fulfill our goal was to raise money and the other is to get our generation involved in philanthropy by benefiting the people who are part of our organization and to try to network everyone for their resources,” Halimi said. “We know people aren’t able to donate money because that’s not where we’re at in our lives as young professionals, but the people around us can or they can donate their time.”

Halimi served as BHUSD’s student board member 1999-2000.

SYP’s PR coordinator Jessica Kimiabakhsh ('01) has been a long-time family friend of Shokrian and said she was “really impressed” when Shokrian shared her idea for the organization.

“I knew I wanted to be part of something that could potentially bring together so many youths in L.A.,” Kimiabakhsh said.

Kimiabakhsh said that being part of SYP has allowed her to connect on a deeper level with others who share in her desire to be involved in the community after going away for college.

In celebration of Israel’s Independence Day May 14, the event will help raise money for three designated Jewish causes by donating ticket proceeds. The event is invitation-only and guests will have the choice of which charity they would like their contribution to go towards. Even though all three chosen causes are Jewish, the organization is not religiously or politically affiliated in any way.

The charities benefited will be the IMA Foundation, which provides financial assistance to the state of Israel; the Magbit Foundation, which gives interest-free loans and scholarships to immigrant and veterans studying at universities in Israel; and Beit T’Shuvah, a residential rehabilitation center for Jews recovering from addiction. Shokrian believes that the causes are broad enough to get people interested in at least one. The group began to reach out to the community on a local level and as a result, Shokrian said most of the support and donations so far have come from the Jewish community, but the goal is to be able to represent a variety of causes.

However, the focus of their debut event is not only intended to benefit the organization’s causes. Members understand that the younger demographic may not have the means to make a substantial financial donation, but many have the resources to do so. The majority of committee members are between the ages of 21 and 30, just beginning their professional careers, and are from the Los Angeles area. SYP hopes to provide those involved with a way to use their own resources to benefit others as well.

SYP members said they have worked hard to get sponsorships for their event and are excited about the support from Forest Foundation, S.B.E. Entertainment and Heeb Magazine. The Foundation made a substantial contribution of \$10,000 to SYP and will provide \$10 an hour to volunteers for their service to SYP. S.B.E. Entertainment, a big

name behind some of L.A.'s trendiest hang outs including night clubs Shelter and Prey, is another big sponsor of the event.

S.B.E's CEO Sam Nazarian ('93) has helped make an additional \$10,000 donation to SYP and has contributed some dinner and drink packages for the raffle. Heeb Magazine is a Jewish quarterly pop-culture publication that is the media sponsor for SYP's event.

The hope is that the event will be mutually beneficial to those involved in the organization as well as the attendees. Not only will the evening showcase those donated resources, but all ticket purchasers will have the chance to become part of a network directory that will connect these young professionals in the future. The database will include information on the guests' educational background, professional interests and their resource connections and will be accessible to all who attend.

According to Shokrian, everyone involved in SYP comes from a different network, whether professionally or socially, and the goal is to get as many people to contribute as possible.

"We want to help people out. It is not just about the charities but it's also about the people involved and we want everyone to get something out of [the event]," Shokrian said.

SYP is aiming to host a successful event and also to peak others' interest in becoming part of the organization as well.

"The whole point is to give people a chance to get whatever they want out of this organization. We have such an eclectic group of people with so many varied skills who can get involved on so many different levels," Kimiabakhsh said.

The group believes their approach to philanthropy sets them apart from other youth volunteer programs and they hope to carve a lasting niche for young professionals to both benefit and contribute.

"I know lots of organizations have young leadership programs or sectors of their own organization, but all very cause specific. We want to support all causes and charities, and we're also about making it attractive," Shokrian said.

Halimi is grateful for the support the community has provided thus far and SYP plans to continue working positively with those around them to build the organization in the future.

"The feedback from the surrounding community has been amazing and people have been really receptive to us. We also make our weekly meetings open," Halimi said.

SYP meets every Sunday evening in an informal setting as a way for the members to spend time together socially and also to plan for their upcoming event.

After their event next month, one of SYP's goals is to gain momentum and exposure and to create awareness among other young professionals about the society's purpose. After building a strong Los Angeles foundation, SYP is looking to a national level with an ultimate goal of having bicoastal representation and chapters in other cities.

For more information on The Society of Young Philanthropists or their upcoming charity-fundraiser, visit the website: www.philanthropysociety.org.