

Women's group announces grant, awards for community service

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A \$10,000 grant announced Wednesday will support a mentoring program that matches University of Illinois women athletes with 120 eighth-graders, freshmen and sophomores from the area.

Three local women also were recognized for exceptional contributions to community service and to improving the lives of women.

The University of Illinois at Springfield's Volunteer & Civic Engagement Center and UIS Athletics received the \$10,000 inaugural grant from the Women for Women Giving Circle, a Sangamon County Community Foundation initiative formed in 2007 to focus on issues affecting women.

Founding members join by contributing \$1,000 per year for three years. Fifteen local non-profit organizations submitted proposals in June for the competitive grant to support programs directed toward women.

"I think it will be the first of many, many celebrations that we'll have in the future when we're able to pool our funds and give part of that money each year to some organization or idea that helps women and children," said steering committee chairwoman and former Springfield mayor Karen Hasara. "Our goal when we started was to have 100 members. We're at least halfway to our goal."

The grant will be used for the "Girl to Girl Dream Speakers" mentoring program that matches UIS women athletes with groups of eighth grade, freshmen and sophomore girls to help encourage them and prepare them for college, said foundation director of donor and public relations Jennifer Sublett said.

The funds also will be used to host two events in the fall and spring that will be open to all eighth graders, freshmen and sophomore girls.

"The beauty is that we have this fund set up so a portion of the annual interest is taken out for awards," said Sublett. "It's a permanent resource for grant-making for Sangamon County women and girls."

Kelly Thompson, UIS' director of the Office of Student Volunteer Services and Civic Engagement, was one of three people from the university who accepted the grant during a ceremony held at the Inn at 835 in Springfield.

"Working together, we can achieve so much more than working alone," she said. "We do need to speak dreams to each other and to our children."

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