



Zip-lining retreat headlined Woodland for Women Worldwide's fall activities. The group has several discussions planned for 2013. CONTRIBUTED

Woodland for Women Worldwide enjoys busy fall, plans for more

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BEACON FALLS — Woodland for Women Worldwide has been busy. Really busy.

In just the first few months of this school year, the organization has expanded its "Get Real" campaign, enjoyed a leadership retreat and is planning several talks and events to continue its mission of taking action to improve women's positions worldwide.

The second year of the "Get Real" event focused on eliminating degrading Halloween costumes. "We had nearly all the seniors, both guys and girls, sign the petition to not wear Halloween costumes that sexually objectify you," WWW co-director Lisa Olivere said. "It was so successful that we're taking the Get Real campaign and focusing on the media and advertisers to represent women in a more realistic way."

The group also went on a retreat to a zip lining adventure facility in Middletown to help develop its members' leadership skills. "We realized that we had spent a lot of time focusing on fundraising for the Run for a Revolution and not as much in developing leadership within the organization," co-director Meghan Hatch said. "It really served its purpose. Kids overcame physical and mental obstacles that they didn't think they ever could."

"We want them to realize that even when they feel discomfort, it's worth taking a risk," Olivere said. "We want to invest in the entire membership. Our leadership scholarship goes to one person; this retreat went to our whole membership. We hope that everything learned that day will carry through to everything else we do." Also this fall, senior Lindsay Hawthorne put together a presentation and discussion group about cyber-safety for her senior project. State Trooper Sam McCord shared ways to avoid risks and stay safe while using growing technology. "We had a great dialogue that night among students, faculty, community members and parents," Olivere said. "The question that really came up was how social media can hinder you," Hatch added. "We know how it helps but we haven't really discovered how it hinders. We had one girl say she's so comfortable typing and texting that she gets nervous when she has to speak in a classroom setting. It brought up how young people are developing in this world."

Woodland for Women Worldwide's current project focuses on raising awareness of Pakistani advocate Malala Yousafzai, a teenager shot by the Taliban in October because she worked to improve women's education and rights in that country. The group decorated a tree for the United Way Festival of Trees about girls education and empowerment and is starting a poster campaign that will direct people to sign petitions in support of Yousafzai and the Pakistani movements she represents. "This Malala campaign is a simple and accessible way we can act to help make a difference," said Olivere, who added the group will sponsor an all-school read and a video to help other students understand the situation.

For the second year, WWW will also award its Chase Pioneer Award. The group has been taking nominations and will accept them until Dec. 10 with the goal of presenting the award the week before Christmas. The award is meant to honor a "female in Region 16 that has overcome adversity, displays bravery and has a pioneering attitude," Hatch said.

The group is also planning discussion groups with author Christine Ieronimo and actress Shay Mitchell. Ieronimo will share details about a library being constructed in Ethiopia, one toward which Woodland for Women Worldwide contributed \$3,500 from last year's Run for a Revolution. "She just got back from Ethiopia so in February she's going to come back and share her photos and experiences and tell us how the library is coming together," said Olivere, who also said the annual Run for a Revolution will likely be postponed to next fall so the group could catch up on other opportunities. Mitchell, who stars in ABC Family's "Pretty Little Liars," will talk to a group in January about several issues facing young girls throughout the world. "She wants to sit down and have an intimate conversation with them about what it's like growing up as a girl today and the obstacles she faced," Olivere said. "She wants to learn from them, and we're going to learn from her."