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Leadership conference aims to inspire local high school girls

By Eryn Carlson
The Patriot Ledger

Posted Mar 13, 2013 @ 04:17 AM

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MILTON — Sometimes, all it takes is a little push to be inspired to achieve your goals. For high school student Georgia Panagiotidis, that push came in the form of the Leadership in Action conference at Curry College.

Panagiotidis, a junior at Rockland High School, was one of 145 sophomore and junior girls at the third annual conference, which was presented Tuesday by the South Shore Chamber of Commerce's Women's Business Connection.

"They really give you the sense of strong leaders – I see them as mentor figures," said Panagiotidis of the businesswomen at the conference. "I love it; I think it's awesome."

Leadership in Action aims to support leadership development by introducing participants to careers through businesswomen in the community.

Panagiotidis, who is involved in the school newspaper and student government, was joined by students from many South Shore high schools, including Quincy, North Quincy, Weymouth, Braintree, Abington, Brockton and South Shore Charter in Norwell.

"We want to inspire (these girls) and spark something in them," said Sandra Elmasian, a psychotherapist and co-chair of the Women's Business Connection's steering committee. "We want to expose them to the options they have."

Elmasian said she has seen a "light bulb go off" in the heads of attendees in previous years. She said many of the girls realize, often for the first time, their potential and the education and career possibilities ahead of them.

Many of the girls, who are selected to attend by guidance counselors at their schools, have never set foot on a college campus until coming to Curry for the conference.

"Specifically, we're trying to introduce how leadership and working together can help the girls reach their goals," said Kathleen Chrisom, chairwoman of the steering committee and vice president of sales and marketing at Conventures, a corporate event company. "We're trying to instill awareness, confidence and a sense of empowerment."

The conference opened with a speech from Megan Khang, a Rockland High student and golfer who qualified for the U.S. Women's Open last summer at the age of 14.

"I loved our keynote speaker – you usually think of golf as a sport dominated by men," said Darline Justinuil, a junior at Brockton High School. "I like (the conference) a lot."

Attendees then went to various breakout sessions – "A Successful You," "A Social You," "A Healthy You" and "An Organized You" – learning about everything from meditation to how to create an online brand for themselves.

The conference concluded with a lunch and a panel discussion, where business leaders shared their stories and allowed students to ask questions.

Life coach and motivational speaker Lisa Sasso, who ran the "A Successful You" session, summed up the conference's overarching message:

"Success isn't about what you wear, how much money you have or your job title – it's who you are on the inside."

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