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Downtown Education Week's goal is to raise contributions, awareness

Downtown Port Washington businesses are putting their bottom lines on the back burner, if only for a week, to promote local scholarship programs.

Downtown Education Week will be held April 1 through 7, raising money for scholarship funds while boosting awareness of the help that is available to high-school seniors looking to further their education.

The local campaign is being spearheaded by Deb Neulreich, owner of Wardrobe Safari and Zing Accessories, and Melissa Suddendorf, owner of Pear & Simple.

In all, eight downtown businesses have agreed to be part of the promotion. Each business will determine which scholarship they want to support, and how donations will be determined.

"The philosophy is to raise awareness about community scholarships at a time when high-school seniors are getting ready to graduate," Neulreich said.

"Through our main street, front-line presence, we are encouraging everyone to financially support scholarships that are raised locally and awarded locally. There are a lot of smaller scholarships that are available, and we all know how the cost of higher education keeps rising."

For Neulreich, the scholarship support is an outgrowth of the fund she and her husband created after their son Ryan was killed by a drunken driver 10 years ago.

The tragedy led to the launching of the RJAN Foundation, a scholarship that uses their son's initials. It supports Grafton students who want to further their education in automotive and diesel engine maintenance.

The family bonded with the family of Port Washington student Paul Watry, who was also killed in an automobile accident caused by a drunken driver.

"We share a grief that only parents who have lost a child to a drunken driver can know," Neulreich said.

For the past four years, Neulreich has coordinated her only storewide sale of the year with the scholarship promotion. Money raised is divided between the scholarship fund established for her son and the Paul Watry Memorial Scholarship.

Last year, Watry's parents Larry and Aggie returned the favor, donating a portion of the proceeds from a similar sale held at PJ's Field of Dreams in Grafton to the Neulreich scholarship.

"Ultimately, it would be really cool for this scholarship promotion to take root countywide. This is

that something good that can come out of something so tragic," Neulreich said.

She said the rules are pretty loose on how each business participates in Downtown Education Week.

Some promotions are date specific. Neulreich will hold a sale at her store, 302 N. Franklin St., on Monday, April 2, to benefit her favorite scholarship funds. That same day, Beanie's, 102 E. Grand Ave., will donate 20% of its sales to the Paul Watry Memorial Scholarship Fund.

On Thursday, April 5, the Pasta Shoppe, 323 N. Franklin St., will donate a portion of all pizza sales to the Community Education Foundation; and on Friday, April 6, the Java Dock, 116 E. Grand Ave., will donate a portion of its hot lunch sales to a scholarship fund.

At the Shoppes of Port Washington, 211 N. Franklin St., the Port Royale gift shop will donate 10% of its proceeds for the week to the Watry Fund, and Sports Images & More will give 10% of its sale proceeds on Friday and Saturday, April 6 and 7, to the Community Education Foundation.

Pear & Simple, 314 N. Franklin St., will donate 10% of its proceeds during the week to the Community Education Foundation.

Anchor Men's Wear, 121 N. Franklin St., will return $5 for each tuxedo rental during prom season to the student's high school.

The methods of giving vary, but the message is clear, Neulreich said.

"That the businesses involved believe so strongly in further training that they are spending a whole week raising awareness and contributing financially to local scholarships that are awarded to local students," she said.

In addition to helping local scholarship programs, she said the campaign will succeed by drawing more people to downtown Port.

"I can't say we have set any sort of goal for how much we would like to raise, but I do hope we exemplify what the Christian spirit is all about and end up writing the biggest check possible," Neulreich said.