



Friday, February 25, 2005

## CosmoGirl speaks Girl Talk

- An Albany teen takes peer mentoring program for teenage girls to a national level.

*Valerie Benton*

**ALBANY** — Haley Kilpatrick aims to establish her peer mentoring program, "Girl Talk," in every state by Year 2010.

In the meantime, the Albany teen is talking with HarperCollins in New York City about publishing a book for teens, acting as one of six national spokespeople for American Eagle Outfitters' Live Your Life Program and structuring a governing board for Girl Talk. She also has her sights on appearing on "The Oprah Winfrey Show."

"I've been going nonstop," said Kilpatrick, the founder of Girl Talk, a peer mentoring program for middle school girls. Since graduating from Deerfield-Windsor School in May 2004, she and her program have found their way into the national limelight numerous times.

Most recently, Kilpatrick has been named one of six spokespeople for American Eagle Outfitters' Live Your Life program. She received a \$500 donation for Girl Talk from American Eagle, which paid her travel expenses and gave her a \$500 gift card and the clothes she has modeled.

Her photograph and a description of Girl Talk can be seen by customers, ages 15-25, who shop in any one of more than 800 stores in the country or who view the American Eagle Outfitters' Live Your Life Web site.

"For me, it was priceless," Kilpatrick said. "It was great exposure for Girl Talk. It's pushed me to take Girl Talk to the next level."

Kilpatrick said American Eagle officials spotted her in a CosmoGirl layout featuring her as not only CosmoGirl of the Year, but also one of its Born to Lead \$10,000 scholarship winners. The company picked Kilpatrick to help launch its Live Your Life program, designed to inspire teens and young adults to pursue their dreams to improve the world.

According to a recent survey conducted by American Eagle and Sovereign Marketing of 1,043 individuals, ages 15-25, 86 percent of teens and young adults have a special dream or goal, but about 85 percent of them have not reached it. The survey indicated that their biggest hurdle is lack of money or resources.

Emily Leon, American Eagle's senior manager of public relations, said that Haley was selected as a role model because "she took a situation that was close to her heart, that she saw as a problem ... and was inspired to help. When someone takes the next step and wants to help others, that

really resonates with us. Our hopes are that they will inspire our customers to go out and accomplish their dreams."

Haley and five other spokespeople, all between the ages of 16-23, will begin judging entries to the Live Your Life contest, which ended Tuesday.

Teens were invited to enter either a 300-word essay or a five-minute video/DVD that explains their dream or idea for changing the world. Six contest winners will receive support, resources and \$25,000 towards making their dream a reality. They will also replace the current spokespeople, and will be promoted in July in American Eagle stores during their back-to-school campaign. Leon says, however, that this does not end the company's relationship with Kilpatrick and her five counterparts, all of whom were introduced in early January.

In November 2004, Kilpatrick, an 18-year-old Kennesaw State College freshman, was named CosmoGirl of the Year out of a possible 20,000 entries. CosmoGirl, a teen magazine born out of the adult publication, Cosmopolitan, is targeted to girls 14-20 who are struggling with all areas of their lives.

In her essay and in her testimony on display for American Eagle customers, Kilpatrick tells how she was often excluded or treated cruelly by other middle school girls. When her sister started middle school, she observed her sister going through similar situations.

Under the guidance of several Deerfield-Windsor Middle School officials, Kilpatrick kicked off Girl Talk, a program that focuses on social issues that middle school girls face.

During the weekly meetings, Kilpatrick "challenged them to think before speaking about another girl: Is what you're saying true, helpful, important, necessary and kind?"

Kilpatrick plans to apply for nonprofit status for Girl Talk, which has been implemented in eight schools. In addition, she's developing a 70-page handbook and a website, [desiretoinspire.org](http://desiretoinspire.org), to coincide with the program.

In addition, she's creating a board of directors and an advisory committee to oversee the operations of the program. "I want people who are as passionate about Girl Talk."