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She's got desire to inspire

- A recent Deerfield-Windsor School graduate takes mentoring to heart.

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ALBANY — For Mary Catherine Kinney, Girl Talk isn't just a hobby. It's a way of life.

For the past four years, the recent Deerfield-Windsor School graduate has dedicated herself to the aptly named nonprofit program that enables high school girls to mentor their middle school counterparts. The chapter leader, along with a handful of peers, meets weekly with approximately 30 girls for a time of bonding. "We have snacks and play games," Kinney said.

The 2005 Miss Albany Teen explained that the mentoring process also includes addressing personal issues. "We talk about everything," Kinney said, explaining that the young members have the freedom to anonymously ask any question of their advisers. "We have an anonymous question box that they can put questions into."

The Girl Talk members serve their community, as well, with such projects as building birdhouses with Habitat for Humanity or volunteering with SWGA Therapeutic Riding Center. "Every three months we do a project on a Saturday," Kinney said, adding that the group's ambition continues to expand. "This year, we also want to adopt a family for Christmas."

The daughter of Davis and Angel Kinney pointed out that she receives just as much benefit from the organization as the young members. "It holds me accountable," Kinney said. "Those girls hold me as a role model."

Even though her high school career has come to a close, the 18-year-old doesn't plan to leave Girl Talk behind. Instead, Kinney intends to join the organization's founder, Haley Kilpatrick of Albany, at the national headquarters in Atlanta while also joining her at school. "I'm going to Kennesaw State University," Kinney said, explaining that she will spend a great deal of time traveling across the United States to promote Girl Talk. "By 2010, we want to have chapters in all 50 states."

Her work is already coming to fruition as an additional chapter is planned to open in Dougherty County. "Byne Christian School is starting one this fall, starting Aug. 9," Kinney said.

Since becoming a part of Girl Talk as a high school freshman, Kinney has stood behind the national organization's motto, Inspire Me. "It's so hard to step out of the crowd and not be an outcast," Kinney said, explaining her empathy with the young members of the organization that has chapters in 19 states.

Her dedication to the four-year-old organization's mission hasn't gone unnoticed. She was recently named the 2005 Girl Talk National Leader of the Year. "I'm the first person to ever get it," she said. She has also been included when the organization itself received national attention. In January, she and Kilpatrick trekked to New York for the Do Something Brick Awards, where they were runners-up.

Although the event provided plenty of opportunity for star sighting, Kinney was most thrilled to encounter other philanthropists. "We heard the president of Dress for Success speak," Kinney said.

Kinney's passion for Girl Talk seems to have permeated her life. So much so that she is thinking about a career choice that will help her promote the organization. "I'm leaning toward corporate event planning," she said.