

Rotary Supports Higher Ed. Via More Than Bootstraps

WESTFIELD — Long-time Westfield resident Audrey Fisch, Ph.D., spoke to the Rotary Club of Westfield at its January 9 regular meeting about More Than Bootstraps (MTB), a 501c3 of which she is the founder and president and to which the Westfield Rotary Club Foundation has provided grant support for the past three years.

Dr. Fisch cited some shocking statistics: that only 9 percent of low-income students earn their college degree by age 24. In the community that MTB serves, Passaic, a low-income, majority Hispanic community, only 45 percent of Passaic Public School graduates pursue college or a vocational program and only 21 percent of those students return for a second year of higher education.

The educators who founded MTB, like Dr. Fisch, know the potential of these first-generation college students and the challenges they face trying to pull themselves up by their bootstraps in the challenging universe of American higher education.

The program has been a success and is growing. MTB currently is looking to expand into other New Jersey communities.

The program matches local college students with high-school students as mentors in what is called a “near peer” system. If students see that their peers, from the same town and ethnic background, can succeed, that is strongly encouraging. The curriculum has three parts: first, to help the students through the maze of college applications and financial-aid, grant and loan programs for college; second, to grow their ambi-

tions and professional skills by, for example, meeting first-generation college graduates from the same town and learning about their journeys and careers; third, to communicate with the families about what to expect, and how to encourage and support their children.

The mentors and the students in the program receive small stipends. The high-school students receive a refurbished laptop computer in their junior year. There are two students to each mentor, and they meet at least weekly. The program started with 11 students four years ago, and is now up to 43. MTB hopes to continue to grow the program. To learn more, visit www.morethanbootstraps.org.

The Rotary club is holding its annual fundraiser for scholarships and grants, called Breakfast with the Bands, on Saturday, March 2, from 9 a.m. to noon. It will take place in the cafeteria of Westfield High School, located at 550 Dorian Road. Tickets are \$10 at the door.

Since 1967, Westfield Rotary has awarded \$3.5 million in scholarships to 1,800 students. Applications for Westfield students are accepted through the Westfield High School Guidance Department.

The Rotary Club of Westfield meets the first three Tuesdays of each month for lunch at noon at Limani Seafood Grill, located at 235 North Avenue West, Westfield. Guests are always welcome. For information, check out the website www.westfieldrotary.com or contact Club Secretary Dr. D. Michael Hart by email at drmhart@yahoo.com.



HELPING HANDS...More Than Bootstraps founder and President Dr. Audrey Fisch, left, is pictured with Rotary Club of Westfield President Barbara Frantz, Esq. Dr. Fisch discussed during the Rotary Club's January 9 meeting how the “near peer” mentorship program is helping students to overcome challenges and succeed in college.