

Entrepreneur of the Month

**** Haley Kilpatrick ****

Home: Atlanta, Georgia
Age: 20
Education: enrolled at Kennesaw State University, studying Communication

Organization: Girl Talk
Position: Founder and Executive Director

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One Youth's Desire to Inspire Spurs National Organization in Support of Mentoring Girls

After a morning meeting, 20-year-old Haley Kilpatrick catches her breath for yet another phone call in the string of appointments related to running a nonprofit organization.

"I may have to put you on hold. We just found out that a talk show is calling about doing a feature that could include us," Kilpatrick says in her upbeat voice. "But this is about as low-key as it gets around here!"

Kilpatrick's foray into business and the nonprofit world has been anything but low-key.

At age 16, she founded Girl Talk, a national not-for-profit organization based in Atlanta, Ga. Girl Talk brings together teens and young girls in a mentoring relationship to help them traverse triumphs and trials of adolescence.

As Girl Talk's executive director, Kilpatrick is balancing her leadership role with college courses and trips across the country to visit Girl Talk chapters in 19 states reaching nearly 10,000 members.

Having been honored by CosmoGIRL! and chosen as a spokesperson for an American Eagle Outfitter's campaign, Kilpatrick is also the second recipient of the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship's EYE*deas award (see box below).

Spark of an Idea

In middle school, Kilpatrick experienced what nearly every young girl does: social anxiety. She even spent a few weeks eating her lunch in a restroom stall to avoid awkward situations in the school cafeteria.

When Kilpatrick's younger sister entered middle school, she ran into similar trials. That's when Kilpatrick decided it was time to step up and start talking about issues pushing girls apart.

She approached the headmaster at her sister's school with the idea of pairing older high school girls with middle school girls for mentoring and to boost self-esteem. Administrators turned her down, but Kilpatrick wouldn't give up. She tweaked her proposal, promising not to use specific

names of girls in group meetings and adding faculty advisors. The school invited her in, and that was just the beginning of the nationwide spread of Girl Talk groups.

Groups consist of high school girls meeting weekly with the middle school girls to listen and offer support. Girl Talk is free to any female high school leader that wants to make a difference in her school and community.

The middle school girls are able to communicate their concerns, problems and exciting news through the Girl Talk's anonymous question box, which gives high school leaders topics to address in their weekly meetings with the middle schoolers.

Each chapter requires an adult advisor to be present at Girl Talk chapter meetings and events. This person can be the middle or high school's guidance counselor, a favorite teacher, a female coach, a mom, a female college student or even an aunt.

Girl Talk currently has home school chapters, athletic teams chapters, youth groups, after school programs and Girl Scout groups.

On the Girl Talk website, Kilpatrick quarterly features Girl Talk leaders from across the country who are making a difference in their communities.

"We do this not only to honor the Girl Talk leaders, but we hope that their stories will inspire other girls to become leaders," Kilpatrick said. "and we hope that it will also inspire current leaders to be even better."

Girl Talk's 2005 National Leader of the Year was Mary Catherine Kinney of Albany, Ga. Kinney's group usually has about 45 to 50 middle school girls and nine leaders.

"I want for each girl to say that she learned something and then as a result, apply what she learned in a real life situation that may arise," Kinney said about her expectations as a leader. "I also want the girls to develop a love for community service. I think Girl Talk is a great place for that."

Haley's goal is to have Girl Talk in all 50 states by 2010.

Local Businesses and National Brands Step up to Support Girl Talk

Kilpatrick was no stranger to the world of entrepreneurship. Her father started his own business in designing high-tech audio/video systems.

"The entrepreneurial instincts were with me at an early age," she said.

But Girl Talk didn't become the organization it is today without a lot of hard work and some setbacks. Being a teen didn't always help. Kilpatrick plead her case to outside sources for support. Many groups and potential funders weren't interested in ideas coming from a high school student.

But she persevered.

As a senior in high school, Kilpatrick applied for a CosmoGIRL! scholarship. She was honored first by CosmoGIRL! Magazine as their "2004 CosmoGIRL! of the Year," and recipient of a \$10,000 Maybelline New York scholarship. She was flown to New York City where she was photographed for a 3- page spread that featured Girl Talk. Along with the magazine article, Haley was recognized at the annual Born to Lead Awards.

The article in CosmoGIRL! led American Eagle Outfitters to Haley. They asked her to be the official spokesperson for their "Live your Life" Spring 2005 campaign. Haley's story was featured in more than 850 American Eagle stores across the U.S and Canada. Haley also served on the panel to help select six young adults to win a \$25,000 prize to fulfill their lifelong dreams. American Eagle recently held an event to honor Haley as a role model.

Along with those awards, the Georgia state legislature even posted an official resolution honoring Kilpatrick's dedication to young girls.

With all that exposure under her belt, Kilpatrick approached Brown Bag Marketing, Inc., of Atlanta, Ga., to help her take Girl Talk to the next level.

“I basically told them that I knew that I was on the brink of something huge,” Kilpatrick said. “I was young, but I convinced them that if they believed in me, I would put them on the map.”

Brown Bag smartly joined Kilpatrick’s team and “donated thousands of dollars, designed our website and just put us out there,” Kilpatrick added. They worked with Haley to build a business plan and began to recruit other corporate sponsors.

Haley is currently a 20-years-old junior at Kennesaw State University, where she is studying communication.

This past year alone, she has traveled to 12 states and has spoken to more than 15,000 youth and educators. Kilpatrick currently serves on the Girls Inc. Summit Leadership Panel, hosts workshops for the Georgia Department of Labor’s Workforce and serves on the Georgia Youth Entrepreneurship Panel.

Most recently, Girl Talk secured a \$100,000 grant from Bell Capitol management, an Atlanta area investment advisor.

Kilpatrick said the new funds will be used for starter kits for existing Girl Talk chapters, which include journals, t-shirts and a copy of the “Girl Talk Handbook.”

The future is wide open for Kilpatrick. She plans to eventually serve full-time as executive director of her organization, hiring more staff and expanding the program to more states.

“I just see Girl Talk continuing to grow,” she said. “We are even starting to reach an international audience.”

Kilpatrick is also planning to host the first of her annual youth summits and invite Girl Talk leaders from across the nation.

“It’s just humbling to me to see how this has unfolded,” she said. “I hold very high standards for myself and my actions, and just knowing that I’m able to serve this group of young girls is amazing.”

Her advice for other young entrepreneurs: “Don’t let age get in the way of your dreams. If I would have listened to everyone telling me that I was too young, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

-By Lisa Bauer, 10/06

For more information on...

... the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, go to www.energizingentrepreneurs.org

... Girl Talk, go to www.desiretoinspire.org

EYE*DEAS Talent Search.

Between now and the end of 2006, the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship will collect community-based youth entrepreneurship stories and share them with others who are working in this field. We want to find out:

- what young entrepreneurs and communities are doing,
- what these entrepreneurs and community-based programs may have in common,
- what communities can do to better support young entrepreneurs, and
- what will draw more young people to entrepreneurship as a career choice and pathway to building their future in rural community.

On the community level, we seek to learn more about the linkages between these young entrepreneurs and programs that have had an impact on their decision to pursue entrepreneurship in a rural setting. We will explore what communities and schools are doing now to support young people who have an interest in entrepreneurship, and who may have the desire to stay in or return to their community in the future. Our plan is to connect the dots regarding what elements of youth engagement can make the most difference in the long run. To do this, we need your help. We are looking for your best stories about young entrepreneurs and community-based youth entrepreneurship programs or projects that you feel are making a real difference. The possibilities for this exploration are very exciting, so please feel free to share this information widely with your network of organizations and communities. The more people who know about this, the more stories we can collect and the more we will learn!

Guidelines for Nominations

The E² EYE*DEAS Talent Search is accepting nominations through a simple online submission process. Nominations will be accepted in each of two categories:

- Young entrepreneur - A young person (or group of young people), aged 5 to 25, who currently owns and operates a successful entrepreneurial business that he or she established or acquired from a previous owner, or who currently leads an innovative entrepreneurial civic program or project that provides some public benefit.
- Community-based youth entrepreneurship program - Programs or projects that engage young people, ranging from elementary to secondary school age, in learning about or practicing entrepreneurship. Post-secondary level programs may be submitted if they are directly related to some community-based practice such as apprenticeships, micro-business or entrepreneurial civic projects. Eligible programs and projects may be school, organization or community led, such as entrepreneurship classes, extracurricular projects, or community youth programs.

While all nominations are welcome, the Center is particularly seeking those EYE*DEAS that may not be widely known or have popular acclaim or those that are being performed on an informal basis. Frequently, young people or their communities are engaged in entrepreneurial efforts that do not take the shape of a formal organization, or receive recognition, yet are affecting the community in a positive way. Submissions will be evaluated based on their value as model practices for others in the field and the Center's ability to verify success. Stories may be featured in the Center's newsletter, website and national media releases. They may also be used in research, training and presentation materials. Anyone – friend, family, teacher, entrepreneurship coach, mentor – may nominate a young entrepreneur or a community-based youth entrepreneurship program for the EYE*DEAS Talent Search. The youth team at the Center for Rural Entrepreneurship will evaluate submissions as they are received and will notify nominees and their nominators if chosen as an “E of the Month” story featured on the Center’s website. A cash prize of \$100 will be paid to any young entrepreneur or program that is selected as an “E of the Month” story between now and December 31, 2006.

To receive a nomination form, send a mail to youth@ceer.org