

South Portland Cape Elizabeth NextSentry

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Thursday, August 16, 2007

South Portland aims to reduce financial obstacles to college

By Amanda Estes
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September is back to school time for students of all ages and this fall, a South Portland organization hopes to raise enough funds to make higher education a more feasible goal for all South Portland High School graduates.

On Monday, the city council proclaimed September to be South Portland Project Scholarship (SPSS) Month.

The goal of the SPSS organization is to raise \$20,000 in order to form a partnership with the Maine Community Foundation toward the goal of providing a \$2,000 scholarship for each of the first two years of post-secondary education for every South Portland graduate.

"Eighty-five percent of the 2007 graduates of the high school planned to pursue post-secondary education, however we were only able to financially recognize 100 of these 188 students and this figure includes booster club scholarships," said SPSS's Volunteer Coordinator Ralph Cabana. "Each year the number of students applying for scholarships increases, yet the amount of available money decreases."

Carmita McCoy, a SPSS committee member and mother of a soon to be South Portland High School senior, has over the last three years helped to coordinate college visits for sophomores to private, four year schools, public universities and two year community colleges.

Through a MELMAC grant, McCoy said students were able to learn about the curriculums and programs at five different schools in northern Maine, southern Maine, central Maine, New Hampshire and the Boston area.

"For the students these have opened their eyes to the possibilities of a post-secondary education and where they may fit in which in some cases many students have not considered before," she said.

Jake Viola, a committee member and a soon to be junior at South Portland High, attended a college visit in April.

Addressing the council, Viola said, "Imagine with me that every college bound graduate of South Portland High School is awarded, in addition to their diploma, a scholarship for the first two years of their post secondary education."

"What better gift could we give our graduates than financial aid for their college aspirations?" he added.

The council applauded the organization's efforts to promote higher education for all students.

"I think it's so important that we as a community say higher education is important and that is one of the messages that comes with this \$2,000 grant," said Maxine Beecher. "What it says to that individual is, 'I trust you and this community stands behind you.'"

For more information about SPSS visit:

www.spsd.org/projectscholarship or call South Portland High School at 767-3266.