

CHRONICLE ONLINE

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Learning and giving: Cornell student 'philanthropists' get hands-on experience by handing out \$10,000

[By Susan S. Lang](#)

While many final projects at Cornell this semester involve producing a research paper, students in Brenda Bricker's Leadership in the Nonprofit Environment (HumEc 407) class get to give away money.

As part of the course, which teaches what philanthropists do, the students will give \$10,000 to local nonprofit organizations.

The challenge has to been to solicit grant proposals from the community, weigh the impact and importance of proposed projects, in particular how they serve low-income residents with health or human service needs, and then to decide which proposals to fund -- with real money.

The funding is made possible by a gift of \$10,000 from the Sunshine Lady Foundation Inc., a private charity based in Wilmington, N.C., and directed by Doris Buffett, who credits her father and her brother for providing the wealth to fund the foundation. Her brother is investor and businessman Warren Buffett, who has been ranked by Forbes magazine behind only Bill Gates as the richest person in the world.

"The purpose of the course is to give students who expect to play a future role in philanthropy, charitable giving, advocacy work or as board members of nonprofit organizations an opportunity to have real, hands-on experience in making decisions about funding, budgets and priorities," said Bricker, director of the College of Human Ecology's Leadership Initiative, a certificate program in leadership for undergraduate students.

"The foundation made this gift to enable Cornell students to act as a philanthropic board to learn about making tough funding decisions required for careful management of private funds," she said.

The winning proposals are:

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Doris Buffett, who founded the Sunshine Lady Foundation Inc., speaks to students about the inspiration behind her private charity. The foundation granted \$10,000 to students in the Leadership in the Nonprofit Environment course to give away to local nonprofit organizations. Also pictured is Gligor "G" Tashkovich, A&S '87, JGSM '91, an adjunct program manager at the foundation, who organized Buffett's trip to campus.

- Ithaca Free Clinic, \$6,200 to provide liability coverage for medical volunteers to enable expansion of care at the clinic, a project of the Ithaca Health Alliance;
- Offender Aid and Restoration, \$1,800 toward its Comprehensive Re-entry Services Project;
- Lifelong Northside/Southside Program, \$1,000 to provide free Gadabout transportation for African-American seniors to attend up to 18 programs;
- Longview Lighting, \$900 to help the residential senior community purchase several special floor lamps for low-income residents, including those with cataracts or macular degeneration; and
- Cornell Cooperative Extension, \$100 toward a matching grant for its Southside 4-H Growing Up in Cities project.

United Way of Tompkins County provided support for the students and helped distribute requests for funding proposals to 84 agencies. It also received completed proposals and helped collate and prepare them for the class. More than a dozen guest speakers, including Doris Buffett and almost a dozen directors of local nonprofit organizations, gave the students insights into community needs and the strengths of area nonprofits.

"This class is unusual because we are doing the work that the board of a nonprofit would do," said Molly Spratt, a junior majoring in nutritional sciences. "It is very practical and applicable and not super-theoretical as many courses are. I took HE 407 because I am very interested in working in the nonprofit field as a doctor and hope to be involved with nonprofits for the rest of my life as a volunteer, board member and donor."

Added her classmate Oren Johnson, a human development sophomore: "Often, nonprofits focus their resources on addressing a specific need. I now understand the importance of not only addressing this need, but also engaging others who share the same passions and ideals."