

# Helping Hands

YPC leaders give back to the community

BY MICHELLE GILLAN LARKIN



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*– Christina Spinelli, YPC co-chair*

As the name suggests, one of the aims of the Young Professionals Connective (YPC) of the MIDJersey Chamber of Commerce is to encourage networking. But those leading the group say that another endeavor – their yearly work with a local nonprofit organization – is at least as important. It’s the common thread that weaves the three co-chairs of the YPC together, despite differences in their backgrounds and plans for the future.

“The second I joined the YPC, I was knee-deep in helping to organize the charity’s annual event,” says John Blake, 35. “I was drawn in by the opportunity to give back.” The Howell resident is winding up his two-year term as co-chair, but says he’ll stay active in the group until he’s “aged out,” around 40.

Each year, the YPC picks a nonprofit Chamber member to assist in a number of ways for an entire calendar year, from volunteering for specific events to helping to secure donations and sponsorships for the organization’s programs. This year the recipient is Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children of Mercer and Burlington counties, or CASA.

“We’re doing something really good for CASA and for the community,” says Co-chair Christina Spinelli, who is 36 years old and lives in Hamilton. “At the end of the day, it’s very rewarding to feel that you’re making a difference, even in a small way.”

Co-chair Jillian Stengel says that the chance to volunteer is the best part of the YPC. “You wind up getting more involved with the nonprofit than you probably ever would have,”

says the 28-year-old Morrisville, Pa., resident. “One year, we worked with the YMCA, and now I continue to support them on my own.”

The YPC was the brainchild of former Chamber President Michele Siekerka, who created the group back in 2005 with the goals of identifying the next generation of area business leaders and giving them an opportunity to network and boost their professional skills by becoming champions of a cause in the community. “Their energy level, and their new ideas and different perspective were refreshing,” recalls Siekerka, who now leads the New Jersey Business & Industry Association as its president and CEO.

Roland Pott, president of real estate development company Trenton Makes, Inc., was there at the beginning as the YPC’s first chair, and applauds the multifaceted purpose of the group. “It was fund-raising, but it was also networking, not only for the YPC members, but for the nonprofits who often looked to the young people they were working with as future Board members.”

As much as the three current co-chairs enjoy their philanthropic work, they don’t overlook the new skills they’re acquiring, or that ever-powerful networking piece. In the words of Stengel: “Getting involved in the YPC is a great way to get your feet wet in the business community, and to start making those connections.”