

NP High students attend business conference in Baltimore

By ERIN REDIHAN, Breeze Correspondent

NORTH PROVIDENCE - The North Providence High School chapter of the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) took its first business trip as a club last month. Three members of the club and their two advisers traveled to Baltimore for the National Fall Leadership Conference from Nov. 5 to 8.

"We learned a lot about trust and independence," Gianna Renzi said. "And what we learned reflects here for us as leaders. As club officers, we have to be responsible."

She was joined on the trip by sister seniors Le Huynh and Robin Sagastume and club advisers Linda Parente and Jackie Hilton, spending three days in Baltimore learning not only about business but also many skills that will prove useful regardless of the career field these students ultimately choose.

While in Baltimore, the students attended several workshops and had the opportunity to meet and interact with students from all over the country.

"We really got the chance to communicate with kids from different states and network," Huynh said. "Every state is different with what they're doing. It was fun to listen to people from New York and Alabama."

The NPHS students joined Barrington High School as the only Rhode Islanders present at the event.

The trip to Baltimore was a new experience in many ways for Huynh, Renzi, and Rose. Business dress was required for the conference and the event followed a rigorous schedule that kept the students busy. The workshops covered a number of topics like personal finance, effective communication, and workplace skills. The types of things they learned certainly apply to business, but are easily transferred to other career fields as well.

"In any job you need these business and professional skills," Renzi said.

While these were valuable, the students most enjoyed one seminar entitled You M.A.T.T.E.R., led by noted youth motivational speaker Alton Jamison.

"He was very motivating," Renzi said. "He had lots to back up everything he said: stories, quotes and personal experiences. He made us all cry. It was very touching."

Jamison focused on how to create a positive work atmosphere and how to get different groups of students working together, something that is not always easy in high school.

"You really can't single anyone out," Rose said. "You have to treat everyone fairly."

In short, the conference was a great learning experience for the fledging FBLA chapter.

"This was our first time going to a conference," Renzi said. "We're trying to establish ourselves as a new group."

Now that they have their first conference behind them, the group is looking into possibly entering some competitions in the spring as a means of qualifying for the annual conference in Nashville. The state leadership conference is scheduled for March 5, 2010 and NPHS plans to enter.

In the meantime, the group will begin fund raising as a means of paying for their various local field trips as well as the national conference, should they go.

The girls who attended the Baltimore conference were responsible for paying their own way, something the group hopes to be able to cover in the future. They will be selling rugby shirts at the school in the coming weeks as a start.

"All of the money will go to our trips to offset some of the costs," Hilton said. "We're a new group and this is really our premier year. We're trying to get interest and get some underclassmen involved. We want to promote our ideas, do some fund raising, and have community involvement. We were one of only two Rhode Island schools at the conference while other states had a good showing. We want to work up to that point."

Last year, NPHS joined seven other Rhode Island high schools by incorporating an FBLA chapter. While they started with just 10 club members, there are about 30 students involved this year, many of whom are seniors who will be leaving the group at the end of this year.

These students want to make the most of the school year and build a strong foundation for the classes to come.

"We're doing a car wash fund-raiser," Parente said. "And we'll do community service. When we get together, there are a lot of good ideas, whether it's going into a senior center or reading at an elementary school. We want to create community partnerships every year and have local relationships that we can build on."