Glamour Gals

by JENNIFER MARINO

Like many high school girls, Rachel Doyle and her friends would often get together and give each other makeovers. But in September 1999, her grandmother died in a Nevada nursing home from anorexia due to loneliness. Doyle, then 17 and a high school sophomore, decided to use her hobby to make a difference. She created the GlamourGals Foundation, a nonprofit organization through which New York State teenagers give makeovers to nursing home residents.

“This program...allows teens to give personal attention to women who might otherwise be left alone,” Doyle, now 19 and a Cornell University sophomore, explains.

According to GlamourGals' mission statement, “The program breaks barriers of young adults feeling toward their elders...and opens an innovative venue in which they can share life experiences; namely, the common experience of applying makeup. The elderly women who participate acquire a renewed sense of their own beauty and dignity.”

First, the teens visit a group of women in a nursing home, each one being paired off with a partner. The teens visit their partners a few more times, forming a bond with them. The group then meets at the nursing home for makeovers. Afterwards, Polaroids are taken of the volunteers and the newly made over women. One set of pictures goes into a photo album kept by GlamourGals, and the others are given to the women to “put up in their room to show everyone that they can still look great!”

Doyle hopes that GlamourGals' success will show other teens that they don't have to wait until they're older to make a difference.

It took four to five months and “a lot of self-motivation” for Doyle to launch GlamourGals. She said to herself, “I really want to make this work, and I will make it work.” First, she proposed her idea to a nursing home in her hometown of Commmack, L.I., which would not take her until she had corporate support. Undaunted, she called cosmetics companies, seeking sponsors. She finally peaked the interest of Toni Fischer, Senior Sales Director at Mary Kay Cosmetics, who has since been donating makeup to GlamourGals (other corporate sponsors include Quinina, Inc. and Biersdorf, Inc.).

“At first I was going to brush her off as some solicitor, but as I listened to her, I realized she was a very special high school girl who just wanted to make ladies in nursing homes feel good about themselves,” recalls Fischer. “I was intrigued that a teenager could be so motivated by doing good for others.” So Fischer taught Doyle how to do facials and makeovers using Mary Kay products.

Doyle's first makeover, in January 2000, went extremely well. Two newspaper reporters (one from the NY Times), Fischer, the nursing home activities director, and other volunteers were present. Also present was a cameraperson for a GlamourGals documentary Doyle was producing for The Metro Channel.

After that first makeover, it didn't take long for Doyle to recruit other teens to join GlamourGals. “The program strikes a chord in people,” she says. Through school clubs and speaking engagements at youth groups, Doyle was able to increase GlamourGals to about 75 members, who have given over 100 makeovers to women in Long Island and Queens nursing homes. There are currently five chapters run by high school teens (one on a college campus), and one or two more will open in the Ithaca area by January 2003.

Although Doyle, GlamourGals’ CEO, no longer runs her own chapter, she manages these chapters, chooses their presidents, and supplies them with donated materials. She also does fundraising, and continues to visit nursing homes and give makeovers during school breaks. On top of all this, she plays the violin, is a member of the Cornell Design League, mentors upper-class business students at Binghamton University, and will take part in a workshop on teen leadership and communication at a youth summit this year.

The most rewarding aspect of GlamourGals, according to Doyle, is “the idea that I am able to affect different generations, to make such an impact on people's lives, both young and old. A simple common bond over makeup creates a pathway of communication between young and old.”

Continued on next page >>
One woman, like Doyle’s grandmother, had been very depressed and hadn’t been eating. When Doyle did her makeover, she thought the woman wasn’t enjoying it. Doyle was bummed until a few days later, when a nurse called to tell her that the woman had started eating again because of her makeover. “A little bit of makeup and pampering boosted her self-esteem,” Doyle recalls fondly.

Another woman, Claire, came back for four makeovers. The first time she returned, she pretended she’d never had one. When Doyle showed her a photo, she smiled sheepishly and said, “I just wanted another one.”

Since its start, GlamourGals has received tons of positive attention by the media. In addition to the documentary and the NY Times article, GlamourGals has been featured on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” and CBS’s “The Early Show,” and in Newsday, Glamour, and CosmoGIRL! Doyle was named CosmoGIRL! of the Year in 1999-2000, for which she took part in her first photo shoot and made it into the centerfold.

But GlamourGals’ fame doesn’t stop there. Tabatha D’Agata, a writer, saw Doyle on “The Early Show” and was so impressed, she wrote “Pampered Pal,” a children’s book based on the program. A portion of the book’s proceeds goes to GlamourGals.

GlamourGals is still in need of additional product donations. To donate products, or to start a GlamourGals chapter in your area, visit the program’s website, www.glamourgals.org, where you will find links to the appropriate information and a contact page through which you can e-mail Doyle.

Doyle hopes that GlamourGals’ success will show other teens that they don’t have to wait until they’re older to make a difference. “I’m really into empowering young people to take initiative and be creative,” she says. And that means really believing in their cause. “Real entrepreneurs believe in what they can do and don’t let anything get in the way.”