

Reaching Out to Young Girls

Cedar Crest and the Boys and Girls Club enjoy close relationship

With its dedication to community service, Cedar Crest College has developed close ties with a number of nonprofit organizations in the Lehigh Valley. Students build strong connections with the people in these organizations—but so strong that they invite them to graduation? That's more unusual. And yet, if you were at Commencement 2011 you saw the row of five young girls from the Turner Street Boys and Girls Club, looking on as the Cedar Crest students they've known and grown with for the past four years received their diplomas.

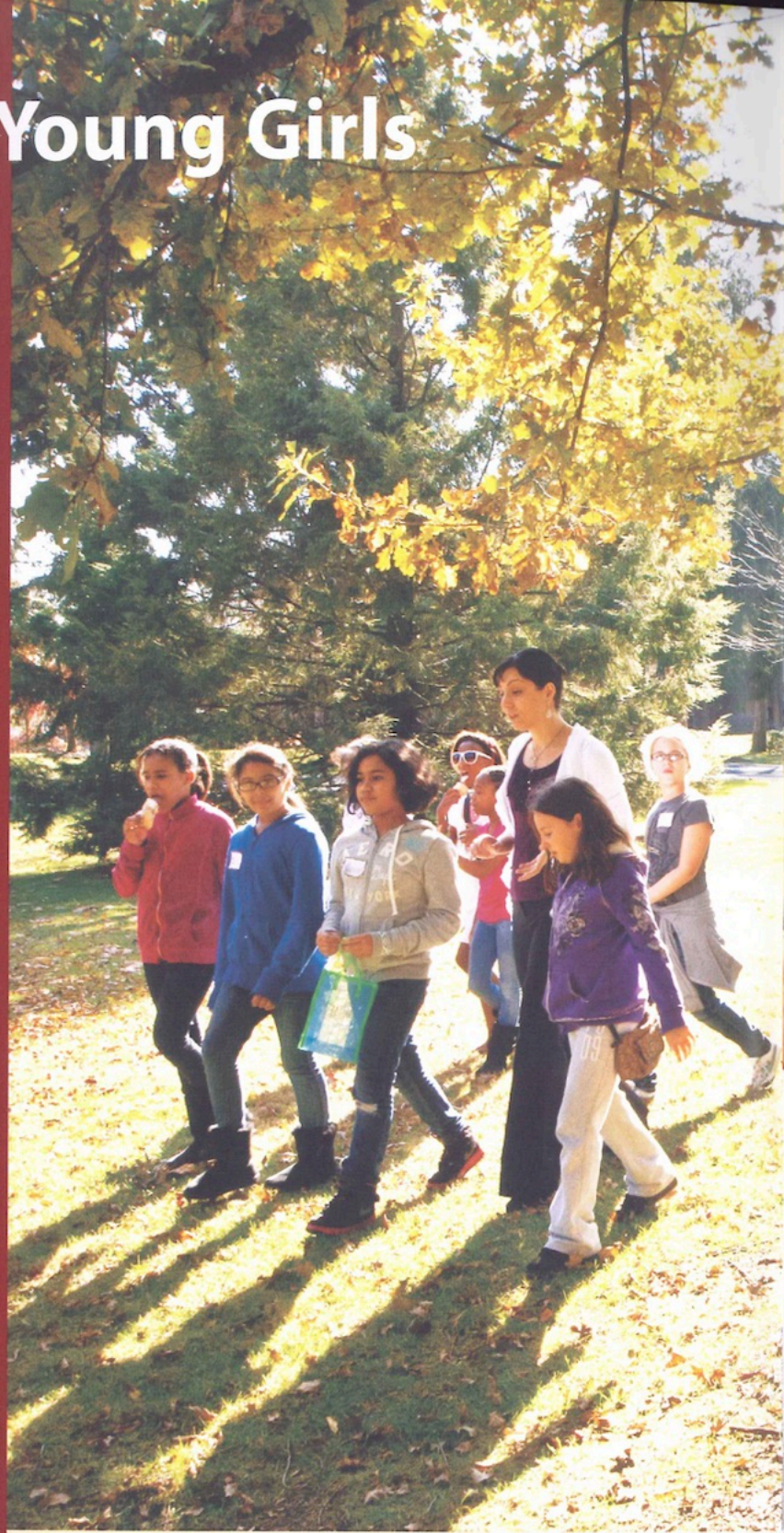
Cedar Crest students have volunteered for the Boys and Girls Club since 1997. The organization has five locations around the Lehigh Valley, but the Turner Street site in Allentown is a natural fit for Cedar Crest since it's an all-girl location. The Boys and Girls Club's mission is to provide at-risk youth a safe and positive environment in which to develop their character and self-confidence. "We focus on five key areas: education and career development, health and life skills, sports and recreation, character and leadership development, and the arts," says Johanna Figueroa, unit director for the Turner Street location.

For just \$15 a year, children aged 5 to 18 are welcome to participate in a variety of activities including photography, gardening, cooking and theater. The club also provides tutoring and literacy support.

Cedar Crest student volunteers tutor as members of the America Reads tutoring program, assist youngsters with their homework, serve as positive adult role models and more. Some students have begun raising funds to set up a scholarship for girls whose families can't afford the annual fee. The Cedar Crest volunteers not only provide a valuable service to the organization, but also develop their own professional skills in communication, conflict management, mediation and time management.

Boys and Girls Club members have had many opportunities to visit the Cedar Crest campus as well. They've attended the College's earth day celebration and sporting events, and have toured the science labs and other facilities. "It opens their eyes to opportunities out there after high school," Figueroa says.

This past fall, communication professor Elizabeth Ortiz, M.A., invited the girls to attend an event titled "Miss Representation" which exposed the media's negative imagery of women. Ortiz and Cedar Crest Board of Trustees member John Bassler both serve as board members of the Boys and Girls Club, and Ortiz will be president starting in May.



A Force in the Community

In 2011, Cedar Crest students performed 22,000 hours of community service, earning the College its fifth consecutive placement on the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. "We are pleased to be recognized for all the time our students, faculty and staff commit to the community locally and nationally," says