

## Face AIDS celebrating first \$1 million in funds

Saratoga native helped start student-led group

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A little more than two years ago, Saratoga native Lauren Young cofounded Face AIDS, a student-led group with the mission of fighting AIDS in Africa.

This past month, Face AIDS celebrated reaching the \$1 million mark in raising funds for its cause.

"It's amazing. We're all kind of walking on air now that we're able to announce we've made the \$1 million. It feels wonderful to be a part of it," Young said.

Initially, the Stanford University student wanted to bring attention to the issue to college students.

But the idea that began with modest intentions has since turned into an organization with ambitious goals. The group has expanded to 150 chapters on college campuses across the country, propelling Face AIDS to the forefront of student groups fighting AIDS in Africa.

Young, 22, came up with the idea after a trip to Zambia where she volunteered to work at a refugee camp. Her experience in Zambia, coupled with her passion to make a difference in the world, inspired her to create the organization.

"I knew I could have more of an impact on the world if I went to the place where the problem needed the most help," Young said.

In late 2005, she began working with other students at Stanford University, giving speeches and raising awareness. But what launched Face AIDS were little beaded pins made by Zambians that were sold on campus to raise funds. The funds go almost entirely to Partners in Health in Rwanda, which aims to combat disease and poverty in the area.

Young said the beaded pins are now made in Rwanda in an effort to "build more synergy" between those making the pins and those reaping its benefits.

Young has moved up from the fieldwork at Face AIDS and now serves as a trustee. Though she is not as involved with the group as she has been in years past, her work in Africa is far from done.

When she graduates in two weeks, she'll head to Liberia to work with a nongovernmental organization helping war-stricken refugees return home.

"Most of the extreme poverty and most of the violence in the world is in Africa. It seemed logical for me to go back," she said.

Meanwhile, Face AIDS will continue to operate out of its headquarters at Stanford University.

Executive director Dave Ryan said the organization is looking to raise the next million in half the time it took to raise the first. He is setting the deadline for the end of the next school year.

"The goal is to make it as big a challenge as possible," he said.

Ryan, 22, said 70,000 beaded pins have been distributed throughout the United States to date, with another 60,000 ready to launch in April.

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Coincidentally, Face AIDS is facing AIDS by essentially putting a face on the issue.

Each beaded pin is accompanied by a short biography of the person who made it. And though not all of them are infected with the disease, each of them is somehow, as Ryan describes it, directly affected.

"There are 98 Rwandans making the pins. Half of them are HIV positive, and the other half is either caring for a family member or orphan who is infected, or has parents who died from it," he said.

The beaded pins are sold on college campuses, with a promise that funds raised from the sales will be matched by Face AIDS. That means each student's contribution is essentially doubled.

Ryan, who is also a Stanford graduate, plays an integral part in finding the matching funds that the college chapters generate.

Ryan said more than 95 percent of the funds come from private donors and organizations in the Bay Area, most notably Saratoga, Los Gatos and other cities in Silicon Valley.

"It is inspiring to them, as it is to me, to see literally tens of thousands of students around the country working in the same cooperative effort," Ryan said, "and to know that what inspires some of that effort is that we are doubling their contributions. People in the Bay Area really respond to that."

Jitka Cymbal is a member of the Saratoga Rotary Club, which helped Face AIDS get started by awarding the group a grant in 2006. She said the club was impressed with the students' enthusiasm and fieldwork in Africa. The club also helped Face AIDS by encouraging other local Rotary clubs and organizations to donate grants.

"I'm definitely glad to hear how well they're doing now," Cymbal said. "They're very nice young people who are determined and motivated. They really sold us."

For more information on Face AIDS, visit [www.faceaids.org](http://www.faceaids.org).

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