

# Advocate Leaders

## Students with causes beyond campus

By Chelsea Ellis

Leaders are everywhere on campus, but some choose to take their message one step further. They aren't satisfied working only on student issues such as planning the Homecoming festivities, organizing the Spanish Club, or leading an intramural soccer team to victory. These three leaders all advocate causes larger than student rights, extending their message from the campus to the community.

### Bringing It All Together

During her first year in college at the **University of Central Florida**, Rachel Russo worked to forge a partnership between environmental groups at UCF and the **University of West Florida**, while continuing to lead as an activist.

"I have a lot of experience in managerial roles through both work and school and in past leadership positions, so I think it's best for me to demonstrate how things can be accomplished when people work together," Russo says. "The key to getting great things accomplished is pulling together all the resources that everyone has to offer."

Russo also was involved in an active postcard-signing campaign with UCF's environmental group, Free the Planet, to protest offshore drilling in Florida. After collecting more than 100 postcards from the UCF dorms in one day, she extended the project to her hometown of Pensacola. She collected signatures from customers in her father's environmentally conscious health food store. By the end of the campaign, Russo had helped send over 2,000 postcards to Gov. Bush.

She also makes environmental consciousness part of her daily life. "That impacts people," Russo says. "If I go with five of my friends and they see me pick up trash, they do it, too. People start feeling ridiculous when they realize they're just standing around while others make a difference. The key is to let people know that they don't have to be part of the problem."

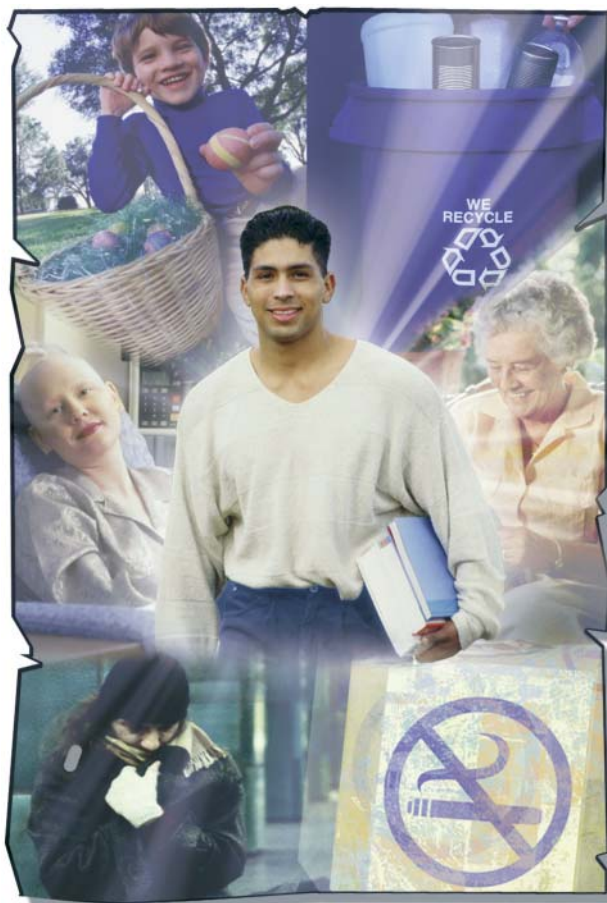
Russo says that because her focus is mostly community-oriented, graduating from college won't change her involvement with environmental organizations. "I work with a lot of the people who are at least two or three times as old as I am," she says.

"Since they have no problem doing it, they set a good example for me."

Contact Russo at [rnr04478@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu](mailto:rnr04478@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu).

### Assigned to Serve

What started out as a homework assignment became a passion for Joey Rego, 2001-2002 president of **Lynn University's** Knights in the Community, who dedicates his time to community service activities such as serving the homeless and caring for orphans.



"I got involved with KIC late in my sophomore year because my roommate and I were required to complete 75 hours of community service for a class," Rego says. "But after a few events working with orphans and serving in soup kitchens, I realized that this was something I truly enjoyed."

This year, Rego was in charge of planning KIC's biggest event, an annual Easter egg hunt for orphans. He says both the kids and the KIC members had a great time doing a variety of activities like playing musical chairs, hitting a piñata, playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, and decorating and hunting for Easter eggs.



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"Being president of KIC changed the way I thought about leadership," Rego says. "I became passionate about making KIC the best organization it could be and I was committed to putting everything I had into it. I feel that the responsibility of holding a high position in any organization tends to change a person tremendously."

"If I could send a message to everyone about the importance of service, it would be that no matter how well off you are or how comfortable you are with your life, it's always necessary to do some sort of community service," Rego says. "Being a part of KIC has been a great experience for me because helping others was my main focus when I was planning or participating in an activity. Seeing that I was making a difference in some way totally blew my mind."

Contact Rego at [joeyrego@yahoo.com](mailto:joeyrego@yahoo.com).

### No Butts About It

When **University of Florida** junior Charlie Douglas lost his grandfather to lung cancer, he became determined to lead others in a crusade against tobacco use.

As a result, Douglas served for three years as president of the Putnam County SWAT (Students Working Against Tobacco) team and a member of the State SWAT Board of Directors while in high school. He was also the Vice-Chairman of the Tobacco-Free Partnership of Putnam County for two years, and in 2000 served as the State of Florida SWAT vice-chairman.

During his time with the Tobacco-Free Partnership, he presented to church youth groups, civic organizations, and elementary schools and handed out anti-tobacco material at fairs, festivals, and sporting events. "One of the more interesting ways that Putnam County reached the community was with our 'Tobacco Free Cowboy,' who spreads the anti-tobacco message on the rodeo circuit," Douglas says. "He would tour the elementary schools delivering presentations on the deadly effects of tobacco, particularly smokeless tobacco—a ubiquitous fixture in the world of rodeo."

After graduating from high school in 2000, Douglas and three of his friends from SWAT started their own youth empowerment organization called Revolution. Since its inception, Revolution has trained the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kid's Youth Advocates of the Year and assisted states such as Georgia, Indiana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin in empowering teens to develop their own anti-tobacco initiatives.

While working with Revolution, he also serves as the health programming director for Student Government at UF. Contact Douglas at [douglas\\_charlie@hotmail.com](mailto:douglas_charlie@hotmail.com).