

UHSA alumna Gatts to head up local Road of Life community relations efforts

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Audra Gatts, an Upper Arlington High School alumna and 2004 Dartmouth College graduate, recently joined the Columbus-based nonprofit Road of Life -- Cancer Prevention for Kids.

As communications director, Gatts will work to publicize Road of Life's programs and initiatives to increase the organization's base of supporters.

"This is an exciting time for Road of Life," Gatts said. "I look forward to contributing to the expansion of Road of Life's innovative programs, and to being challenged by the work ahead."

Road of Life focuses on implementing health and wellness programs in schools to teach students lifelong healthy behaviors.

"We focus on helping kids be healthy so that we can help them prevent cancer as adults and other chronic diseases," such as diabetes, said chairman Rob Emerich.

Chronic illness is something with which Emerich, who lost a sister to cancer and whose mother is a breast cancer survivor, has personal experience.

Emerich's experience motivated him to found Road of Life in 2002 "to try to make the biggest difference in the fight against cancer that we possibly could," he said.

Road of Life has partnered with national service organization City Year to expand its cancer prevention and education to schools around the country.

"I am a very strong advocate of the Road of Life cancer prevention for kids program and the innovative work they have done with the Columbus Public Schools," Andrew Ginther, CPS board member, states in a testimonial to Road of Life. "I am thrilled to hear that the tremendous impact they have made in Columbus will be available to schools throughout the country."

Road of Life has raised nearly \$200,000 of its \$333,000 goal to assist with the national expansion, Emerich said.

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"We've had a lot of success in Columbus. We've had a lot of success with City Year as our long-term strategic partner," he said. "It's a very aggressive growth strategy."

Gatts will head up public relations and major gifts campaigns related to Road of Life's nationwide expansion. One of her major goals is to expand the membership of Road of Life's Leadership Society and Angel Investors Circle, which provide guidance and financial support to the organization.

"I read about the organization before I came in to meet with anyone here," she said. "I believed in its mission."

Emerich said the initiative Gatts showed in obtaining a grant to build a computer lab in Ghana last year was a major reason he thought she was perfectly suited for her position at Road of Life.

"She put the whole program together from scratch," he said. "I was really impressed."

Gatts, who worked in Ghana from November 2004 to July 2005 after graduating from Dartmouth, said being immersed in another culture was an invaluable learning experience.

"It was a shock at first," she said, "but people are ultimately the same wherever you go."

Emerich said he considers Road of Life's staff members, who are all under 30, "social entrepreneurs."

"Having young people like Audra is refreshing in a community that has sometimes grown stale with old ideas," he said. "That can be our role in the cancer prevention community -- bringing fresh ideas."

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