

Culture of connection

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WAYNESBURG - Our Glass Creations, Fence Row Farmers Market, Pocketsize Productions and Waynesburg Farmers Market are just some of the community projects and entrepreneurial businesses that will be displaying goods and services at Mondo Giusto from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday in the Marissa Fieldhouse, Waynesburg University.

This "Buy Locally - Act Globally" mini-festival is the final part of a project that started last year when four Waynesburg University sophomores were chosen to receive Vira I. Heinz scholarships to travel abroad and learn by living in foreign lands.

"Heidi (Weaver) and I went to India, Natalie (George) went to Italy and Megan (Peebles) was in London," Lynea Byler said. "What we noticed was that in the villages people shopped locally and it went back into the community. This was a reoccurring theme."

After returning to university life in the fall, the women, now juniors, started meeting to share their experiences and come up with their final project. Associate Dean of Students Pat Bristor was there to advise, and a university community impact grant gave them the funds they needed to stage a community celebration of ethical consumerism and sustainable living.

"We started brainstorming to see what we could give back by sharing what we had learned and we formulated this," Byler said. "Our goal was to bring the campus together with the community. We hope to build a stronger sense of community through cooperation, with a focus on fair trade and sustainable business practices tied to the local economy."

"We want to celebrate the culture of Waynesburg," Weaver said.

Mondo Giusto - a playfully chic phrase that the group conjured up - means "Fair World." Peebles, an interactive design major and university yearbook editor who soaked up the fast pace and cultural diversity of London while studying photography and media for six weeks at the University of Westminster, designed the logo and posters and wrote news releases. Invitations went out to businesses and groups, both in Greene County and the region.

"Mondo Giusto is all about supporting local businesses and raising awareness for the importance of fair trade," Peebles said.

Some of the more than 25 vendors include the tasty side of sustainability - Moore's Hot Dogs and Rising Creek Bakery. There are also green products that can be purchased online - Toms Shoes, Narimon Jewelry, Indigo and Costello International.

Jacob Richie of bluegrass band The Hucksters is the opening act at 1:15 p.m. followed by fair trade speaker Evan Kephart and Ten Thousand Villages. Andolino, an edgy soft rock band from Columbus, Ohio, plays at 2:30 p.m. and the project-inspired flower garden that now links one edge of campus to the historic streets of Waynesburg will be dedicated at 3:15 p.m.

The garden, which is landscaped into the corner of Franklin and North Morris streets with walkways and a stone retaining wall, is the brainchild of George, who was inspired by what she found in Italy.

"I volunteered working in a garden, and it was great to see the importance of green space in a city. Having more green space is something that was talked about on campus. We chose the location and the university worked with us to build it. I see it as our connection to the community." Copyright Observer Publishing Co.