



LEADERSHIP MARYLAND

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Towson Students Aid in Planning New Leadership Maryland Web site

By Alan Dessoiff

With the assistance of four talented Towson University students, Leadership Maryland has developed an online marketing strategy that will result ultimately in a new interactive LMD website.

The students said their project with LMD provided valuable hands-on experience as well as an introduction to the world of nonprofit organizations that should serve them well as they begin their careers.

The project began with a recognition by LMD that its three-year-old, first-generation website was a "great start" but was basically an online brochure and needed upgrading, said Surina Ann Jordan, Ph.D., director of marketing and member services, who developed a general web strategy.

The next generation website, she said, has to be interactive, providing presentation, services and support to LMD members and site visitors. The website often is the first exposure people have to LMD and must be "a virtual employee" of the organization, added President Nancy Wolff-Minieri.

After developing high-level web strategy statements and a basic set of requirements, they invited about 25 LMD members who own or work for technology firms to a focus group session that addressed the requirements and possibilities for the new website. One member of the group suggested considering a Towson program that assigns marketing students to work with nonprofits and business start-ups.



L to R: Dave Westlund, Anna Shifrina, Lee Melvin, and Keith Durand

The program is part of a course, "Internet Marketing," that combines marketing and e-business. "We write an Internet marketing plan for client organizations that offer to work with our students. They are typically small organizations and many classes in the program involve community service projects," explained Cathy Kori, an adjunct professor at Towson who teaches the course.

Four students in the course—all seniors who graduated in May—

worked with LMD. They were Lee Melvin, Keith Durand, Dave Westlund, and Anna Shifrina. None was previously aware of LMD. "We had no clue what it was," said Westlund. Once they came to know more about it, however, they were impressed.

"I think it is a wonderful organization. Helping build leaders and an organization of leadership for Maryland is a wonderful concept," declared Durand. "I think it's a great

program. You are helping your community, learning new things, making new contacts. I'd like to consider doing it later," added Shifrina.

All the students found the project worthwhile as a learning experience in other ways, too. "Getting out there and working with an actual organization, I learned how organizations run and how to work with a client," said Melvin. "Some of the things we recommended can apply only to LMD's website, but overall, the objectives can

apply to any website. I learned different things that a website should have," asserted Shifrina. "After we researched it and figured it out, I had a lot better sense of how to make a website work more efficiently," said Westlund.

The students hope to apply what they learned as they begin their careers. Most are seeking work in marketing. "I am looking forward to starting a rewarding career that I can put my heart and soul into," said Durand. "I want to get as much experience as I can in different fields of business and I will see where that will take me," said Shifrina, who planned to start a new job in public relations for a mortgage company in the Washington area.

Westlund began working for a company that manufactures glass roofs for buildings and said he also will "see where it takes me." Melvin said he would like to "do something in marketing."

Meanwhile, Leadership Maryland intends to contract out the development of its new website and will include the Towson students' recommendations in the Request for Proposal that it will send to vendors after sharing it first internally.

"We were very pleased with the work the students presented," said Jordan.

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For more information on how you can become involved in Leadership Maryland, contact Nancy Wolff-Minieri, president, at 410-841-2101, or visit www.leadershipmd.org.