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Girls Unlimited! conference will focus on Money Matters

By AMY CALDER, Staff Writer

WATERVILLE - The annual Girls Unlimited! conference to be held March 6 will focus on money matters, using a \$10,774 grant from the American Express Charitable Foundation, according to conference organizers.

Girls Unlimited! is held annually at Kennebec Valley Community College for girls in fifth through eighth grades to learn skills designed to help them become independent, confident adults.

Hosted by the nonprofit organization, Hardy Girls, Healthy Women, the daylong conference this year is being planned by former participants, now ages 13-18, who have taken the project on as a job and will receive a stipend for their work.

Karen Heck, A Hardy Girls, Health Women founder, said money is a subject girls do not often learn about, but is one that will affect their whole lives.

"The idea that we want to convey to girls is that as they grow older, economic independence is critical to their ability to lead healthy, happy lives," she said. "Unfortunately, girls are still growing up believing Cinderella tales, waiting to be rescued rather than seeing themselves as their own salvation."

Joel Davis, an Augusta-based American Express financial planner, recommended Hardy Girls for funding.

"Helping girls and women get the skills they need to become financially independent has always been an interest of mine and I'm pleased that American Express was able to fund this project," Davis said. "Hardy Girls has a great rep-

utation for teaching girls who might not otherwise get this information and I'm excited that we are partners in this venture."

The registration fee for the conference is \$10 per person but scholarships are available. More than 700 girls have attended the event over the years since it was started in 1999, according to Heck.

Registration information and brochures will be distributed during the first week in February. Those wanting to register may call 861-8131 or visit the Web site www.hardygirlshealthywomen.org and forms may be downloaded.

Heck said some of the girls planning the conference have started their own businesses, and it is important for younger girls to hear money messages from them.

"Even though there's an increasing number of women in the workforce, 75 percent of them are employed in sectors that don't pay a livable wage," she said.

Other workshops at the conference include those related to soap making, science, computer, story-boarding for writers, creating a brochure and creating a business.

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