

Unity for annual charity

High school in a solid drive against Fragile X syndrome

January 30, 2005

HIGHLAND PARK -- Highland Park High School students will be minoring in sales for a month, hawking pizza, ice cream, pottery and romantic dates as part of the school's annual charity drive.

Launched last week, the drive will benefit the National Fragile X Foundation, an organization that supports the families of those stricken with the genetic disease and lobbies for research and improved treatment.

The effects of Fragile X, which is the most common inherited cause of mental impairment, can range from minor learning disorders to severe autism.

Students probably selected the organization because there are at least seven families in the Highland Park community affected by the disease, said Mary Gorleski, the school's writing lab manager and one of two supervisors for this year's drive.

"Kids look for a personal connection," she said.

Every winter for the last decade, the school has raised money for various charities. While the school never sets fundraising goals, \$100,000 was given last year to Friends of Health, which opened a public health center in the area.

"The goal of this charity drive is to bring the community together, to have one cause we're all supporting," said Talia Pines, a senior and one of three student leaders for the drive. "The money is what happens because of the unity."

This year, 28 organizations applied to be the beneficiary. Students and staff chose the Fragile X Foundation in a schoolwide election, Gorleski said.

At a kickoff assembly last week, siblings and a parent of Fragile X victims spoke about their experiences, as did doctors who explained the disease and visited biology classes.

There is at least one event each day of the drive--ranging from a student and teacher trivia contest to a fashion show at Saks Fifth Avenue, as well as food sales at lunch. The fundraiser ends Feb. 25 with a concluding assembly March 9.

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