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Not antiques: Group gets young crowd involved with Greenwich Historical Society

Group gets young crowd involved with Greenwich Historical Society

By Lisa Chamoff
Staff Writer

Posted: 11/16/2009 05:31:48 PM EST

There is a lot of "old" associated with The Historical Society of the Town of Greenwich, but a group of 20- and 30-somethings who have recently gotten involved are hoping to inject a little new into the organization.

Calling themselves the Young Collectors, the small committee is bringing Facebook and martinis to the world of antiques and Colonial houses.

Samantha Knapp, a 32-year-old town native who is heading the committee, wants to help create a unique way for young people to get involved in an important community organization -- one that they probably associate with school field trips.

Knapp, who recently moved back to town after working around the country as a television news reporter, said she was always intimidated by events like Antiquarius, the society's annual fundraiser, which includes a massive weekend antiques show at the Greenwich Civic Center in Old Greenwich. "I really want people to have a comfortable environment where they feel like they can be a part of something," Knapp said.

Betsy Ruprecht, the special events chairwoman for Antiquarius and a longtime friend of Knapp's family, invited her to get involved and bring some new blood into the 52-year-old event.

Earlier this month, the Young Collectors organized a debut party at Beacon Hill of Greenwich, a new development of luxury townhouses. More than 300 people showed up to mingle, drink orange-flavored vodka and pose for photos, which have already been put up on the group's

Facebook page.

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Jen Danzi, who graduated from Greenwich High School in 1990 and is also on the committee, said before coming to the event that some people didn't realize the historical society, which puts on exhibitions and organizes lectures, existed.

"A lot of people out there want to be involved; they just don't know how," Danzi said. "The younger generation hasn't really found their place in these events because there's still that same crowd that's been going forever and ever."

There are more events in the works. After the main opening-night gathering for Antiquarius at the civic center on Dec. 3, the Young Collectors are planning an after-party geared toward people ages 21-37 at Louie's Italian Restaurant & Bar in Cos Cob.

At a recent committee meeting in the rustic old barn at the back of the Bush-Holley House, where the society has its museum and library, members sipped wine and ate cheese, and talked about how the Young Collectors could become more visible. They discussed creating a blog and using the social networking site Twitter. They also tossed around ideas for the after-party, entertaining a retro theme based on the TV show "Mad Men," which is set during the early 1960s.

The partnership is a great match for the historical society, Ruprecht said, and fits in with the "what's old is new again" theme this year for Antiquarius.

"The young people are being introduced to us, and antiques," Ruprecht said. "It's a nice two-way exchange."

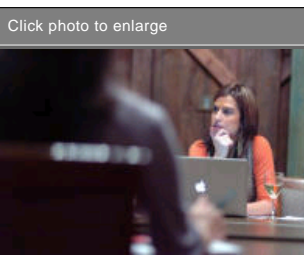
David Sokolsky, a 35-year-old photographer from Norwalk, has also gotten involved, providing visual support. He's also donating a luxury art book by his uncle, fashion photographer Melvin Sokolsky, as a prize at the after-party.

"I don't know what to expect of the group," said Sokolsky, who grew up in Katonah, N.Y. "What I'd like to see is a group of interesting people and whatever else makes them connections, either social or professional."

Knapp has high hopes for the Young Collectors.

"The historical society traditionally has been all about preserving and celebrating this town," Knapp said. "Maybe in 100 years, this will be something tried and true."

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Samantha Knapp listens during the Young Collectors of the Greenwich... (Keelin Daly/Staff photo)

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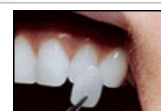
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