

# YOUNG PROFESSIONALS SOCIETY OF GREATER SPRINGFIELD

BY HUNTER GOLDEN

**O**n the surface, the image of a bunch of 20 and 30-somethings all dressed up in a social setting seems like nothing more than a party, but make no mistake about it – The Young Professional Society of Greater Springfield has become a place where serious business is getting done.

“Our growth has been explosive,” said YPS President and Bacon & Wilson Attorney Jeff Fialky. “Each year we’ve doubled our membership, the size of our board and the scope of what we do.”

The numbers certainly back up his claims. Since its first “Third Thursday” social event in 2007, the group’s membership has grown to nearly 500 people, almost doubling in growth each year. The board is comprised of more than 25 area young professionals who sit on 14 committees and plan nearly 40 events a year.

“Without a doubt, there’s an awesome social component to the group,” commented Fialky. “But we’re more than just social events now. We offer CEO luncheons, Golf Tournaments, Community service events, cultural events – there’s something for everyone.”

The reasons why people join are as equal-

ly diverse as the breadth of opportunities the organization offers. Some come to build relationships. Some come because they’re looking for something new. Some even expressed frustration with a perceived lack of opportunity for young professionals in the area. Regardless of the reason, the sense that the organization’s mission and values have resonated with its target audience is palpable.

Incoming YPS Co-Vice President Erin Corriveau of Environmental Compliance Services shared her thoughts as to why YPS has become such a big deal in such a short period of time.

“We’re a passionate, hard-working, volunteer-driven organization,” said Corriveau. “Times have changed a lot and those days where ‘personal’ and ‘professional’ lives were separated by a well defined line- isn’t so definite anymore. Those lines have become

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blurred. Home life and work life are no longer segregated and as a result, people aren't just seeking business relationships, but personal ones as well. People do business with the people they like. I didn't join as 'Erin Corriveau, Public Relations Manager for Environmental Compliance Services'. I joined as 'Erin Corriveau the public relations manager, business professional and mother of two young children who wants to make a difference in the area I grew up in. This organization allows you to do that. You're a person at YPS – not a representative.”

Others have expressed reservations regarding the lack of opportunities for emerging young professionals in the area. These members are taking that negative and turning into a positive by fully engaging with the YPS and sampling all it has to offer.

“As a young business owner, I found it really difficult to stand out at a lot of other networking events,” said member Dr. Ron Laprise, owner of Laprise Chiropractic and Wellness in downtown Springfield. “At YPS, I'm able to network in an environment that's a lot more welcoming. This is a place where there's real business potential. Most of the members are young and ambitious and really want to grow their business.”

Fellow member Matt Moskey of Penfield Productions in Agawam agreed; “I've done almost every networking gig there is in this city and with the exception of some of the really small, more exclusive groups, you don't have anything that comes even close to this one in terms of being able to form relation-

ships with other people,” he said. “When you show up to a YPS event, you can expect to walk in with a pocket full of business cards and walk out with a pocket full of everyone else's. It's easy when you're in a place as welcoming as this, because you can be yourself.”

“The difference, when it comes down to it,” said Laprise. “Is this group's momentum. It's not stale, it's not complacent and it's not the same people doing the same things. It's growing with positive inertia which helps our entire community.”

Perhaps the most common theme - one that is driven hard via the organization's mission statement - is the genuine commitment to the betterment of the Greater Springfield area as a whole.

“Sure, I joined YPS to engage with other professionals in my community,” said Corriveau. “But it's really more of an investment in the area than it is anything else. You hear too much of what's 'wrong' with Greater Springfield these days and not enough about the positives. This is a real positive. From keeping people in the region to helping out with groups like the United Way and Habitat for Humanity, we're doing a lot of good.”

“YPS is really important to the Greater Springfield area,” says Jeremy Casey of Westfield Bank. “They have the 'Live, Play, and Stay' motto and it really just embodies the entire attitude of the collective whole of the organization. It's accentuates the positive aspects about our area as opposed to all the negative ones that so many people seem hung up on.”

“You can't deny the stickiness factor an

## Vote the Valley

### *Their upcoming Vote the Valley Third Thursday event...will give attendees the chance to mingle with many area candidates for several state and local offices spread throughout the region*

organization like this provides," continued Fialky. "When people see opportunity and hope, they want to stay, get involved and see things through to the end. Our organization won't keep younger folks in the area - it's the people that make up the organization."

Not only is the organization turning heads in the community, it's receiving strong commitments from many of the region's economic heavy-hitters.

"One of the most rewarding aspects of the work we're doing is that the local business community is really starting to take notice," said Fialky. "More and more businesses are jumping on board and finding out how to leverage us with what they're doing within their own organization."

Corriveau agreed; "We're becoming a genuine resource not just for young professionals in the area, but professionals in the area, period," she said. "There are opportunities that exist in the YPS that aren't available elsewhere. To be able to sit down with a group of peers and have an informal Q & A with the CEO of Baystate Health is not accidental. Our area businesses realize the potential that a group like ours has and want to start the ongoing dialogue. We have a voice."

Having finally found that voice, the YPS is looking to put it to good use as they prepare for their upcoming Vote the Valley Third

Thursday event to be held on September 16 at the Springfield Country Club in West Springfield from 5-8pm. The event will give attendees the chance to mingle with many area candidates for several state and local offices spread throughout the region.

"No bones about it, this is going to be a total win-win for everyone involved," said Jack Toner of Sumner & Toner Insurance Agency, who also acts as a board member and will chair the event. "It's not every day you get the chance to come and network with people who make and aspire to make policy in our region. It'll give our members a sensational opportunity to ask questions and become more engaged in the political process. The response from the candidates has been overwhelming. Many of them have expressed how important it is for them to meet the future business leaders in this community and gives them an incredible opportunity to meet and interact with them in an intimate setting."

The event is to mark the beginning of a more politically engaged YPS.

"The issue most pressing to YPS members is ensuring the future existence and opportunities for quality, sustainable, professional jobs in the Pioneer Valley," Fialky said. "YPS continues to support any initiatives aimed at professional job creation and sustainability."

While the YPS has come a long way from its small beginnings, Fialky adds that there's much work left to do.

"Like any organization, we have challenges," expressed Fialky. "We're still going to be aggressive in terms of growing the organization, but once you get rid of old problems, you tend to pick up new ones. We're constantly refining the organization with regards to its structure, outreach efforts, and program offerings. We're happy with where we're at but even more excited about where we're headed in the future." **EF**