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Colin Hickey

Local groups back anti-bullying project

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WATERVILLE --River Rock Foundation is a small Freeport organization committed to the pursuit of social justice through non-violent means.

That is why the organization has offered a \$30,000 challenge match to support "Ugly Ducklings," a project initiated by two Waterville groups aimed at creating an awareness and an end to bullying and harassment of gay and lesbian youth.

"Ugly Ducklings" is a play about homophobia at a girls' summer camp. Hardy Girls/Healthy Women and Greater Waterville Communities for Children & Youth are the two organizations producing the drama, as well as a documentary about that production that will be part of a community action kit that will be distributed nationally to communities, schools and families.

Lauren Sterling of Communities for Children said about \$134,000 is needed. So far, she said, \$40,000 has been raised.

The River Rock Foundation gift, especially if the match is achieved, would provide an enormous financial boost, Sterling said.

Marilyn Bronzi, board president of the River Rock Foundation, said "Ugly Ducklings" is the type of innovative approach to social justice that her group strives to identify and support.

"Ugly Ducklings" is not the first initiative in Waterville that River Rock Foundation has helped to fund.

"We have supported Hardy Girls for three or four years," she said. "We found out about their work because one of our board members used to live in Waterville and knew what was going on there. We just like what they are doing for young girls."

Sterling said "Ugly Ducklings" received about \$1,100 in pledges within 24 hours of announcing the River Rock Foundation challenge grant -- contributions can be sent to Hardy Girls/Healthy Women, 114 Common St., Waterville, Maine 04903-0821.

The play will debut at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 15 at Colby College's Strider Theater. Evening performances are scheduled the following two days, as well as a 2 p.m. matinee on Sept. 17.

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