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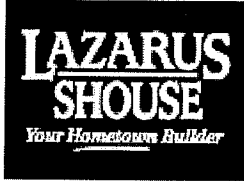
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Monday, May 29 | Upstate South Carolina News, Sports and Information

Tomorrow's leaders providing community service today

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By Brooke Culclasure and Cathy Stevens

"Cowl the Conservation Cow" may be coming soon to an elementary school near you. Cowl is the protagonist of a new children's book focused on conservation and the environment. He travels around with his elementary school mascot friends and spreads the word on how to save the environment. Children all over Spartanburg County are paying attention.

Some may have a hard time believing that Cowl is the brainchild of Dorman High School senior Patrick Sellars, who authored the book and has since created an accompanying coloring book tailored to each elementary school in his district. (Each school has its own coloring book, featuring its respective mascot!) Through his work, Patrick has created a bit of a Cowl craze, and a lot of burgeoning environmentalists.

Patrick's project began as a brainstorm during the summer of 2005, when he participated in the Riley Institute at Furman's Emerging Public Leaders program, a leadership development program offered free of charge to those selected to participate. During the program, rising high school seniors from across South Carolina, as well as from other states, learn more about public policy, civic engagement and public service. As a part of the experience, students identify an issue or problem in their community and return home from Furman to plan and implement a public service project addressing this issue or problem.

Patrick is a leader, as are many of our youth. Whether they are extroverts, listeners, detail-oriented or big-picture visionaries, nearly every person has what it takes to become a leader. Sometimes we stereotype our leaders as the "people people" who like to be the center of attention. This stereotype is a myth. All people, no matter their personalities, strengths and weaknesses, or preferences, can be leaders.

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Programs focused on leadership can lead to an increased sense of self-knowledge, self-worth and belief in oneself. These programs also create conditions which allow young people to understand that leadership isn't all about being in charge or standing in the front of the room. They learn that leadership often is about sitting back and listening, or being the person who motivates and encourages others to be in charge or stand in the front of the room.

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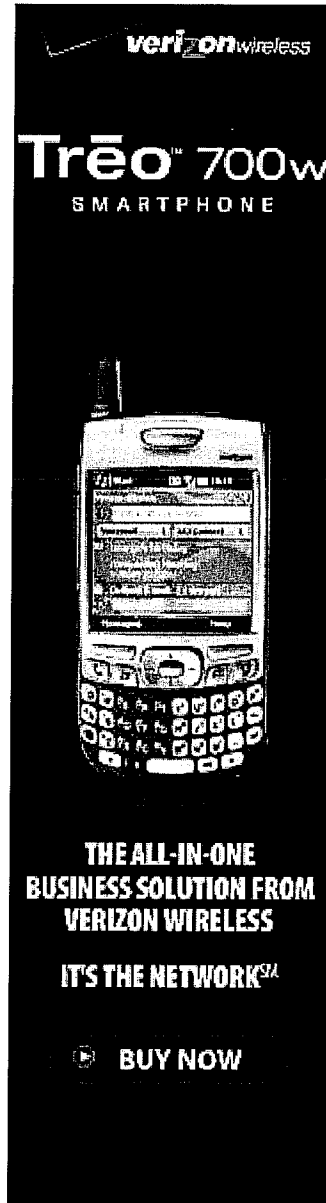
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The impact of Furman's Emerging Public Leaders program, which was recognized in 2005 by Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., with a "South Carolina on the Move" award, has been substantial. Participants have consistently shared how much their lives have been impacted by Emerging Public Leaders. The experience of receiving intensive leadership training and then developing and implementing a public service project has been life-changing for these students.

In addition to "Cow the Conservation Cow," other projects included:

- Omi Naderi, Charleston County School of the Arts, North Charleston. Omi partnered with the Charleston School of the Arts to create a weekly after-school arts program for a local middle school that did not offer an arts program to its students.
 - Shun Griffin, Emerald High School, Greenwood. Shun created "Operation Impact," a program with the goal of enhancing the leadership skills of young people.
 - Will Lankford, York Comprehensive High School, York. Will developed a project that created a volunteer partnership between York Comprehensive High School and York Place Episcopal Church Home for Children.
 - Jane Werrell, Ashley Hall, Charleston. Jane organized the efforts of her classmates and together they worked through Habitat for Humanity to build a playground for children in a local Habitat neighborhood.
- Programs such as Emerging Public Leaders can help prepare our next generation, a generation that, through students like Patrick, Shun, Jane, Will and Omi, already has proved it can be civic-minded, passionate and involved.