

Local teen helps people in a big way

By Stephanie O'Connell
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WALLINGFORD — Josh Powers had always been there to lend a helping hand with food and water filter distribution on his countless mission trips to the Dominican Republic, but he hadn't quite found his calling in the group, as had others.

It wasn't until Josh's aunt handed over the reins to the entertainment portion of the Dominican Republic Mission Team's fundraiser to her then 17-year-old nephew that he found his niche.

Now, at 18 years old, Powers is able to contribute something that he is passionate about to the cause. Powers used his talent and interest in media production to create a talk show-themed — near two hours long — humor-filled show planned for the team's annual fundraiser at Sheehan High School on March 6.

Ever the hard worker, the Quinnipiac University communications major took the talk show one step further. On a November 2009 trip to the Dominican, he filmed a four-minute video with the talk show host set to the Black Eyed Peas' mega-hit "I Got A Feeling." The video, which featured children from the country dancing and singing, was shown at this year's Grammy Awards, during the Black Eyed Peas' performance.

"I found it so cool and ironic that the kids in the video were on the Grammy's, when most of them didn't even know who the Black Eyed Peas are," Powers said. "I saw the video during the performance — it was right over Fergie's shoulder — but not that many people got to see it. But even though many people didn't see it, all the celebrities there got to see it."

Powers has been a member of the Dominican Republic Mission Team since his first trip at just 10 years old. Part of the First Baptist Church of Wallingford, the team has led numerous mission trips to La Romana, Dominican Republic, donating their time and effort toward those in need.

"We are sending a group of 80-85 people, mainly from Wallingford, to the Dominican in July," said John Powers, a member of the DR Mission Team

and Josh Powers' father. "We hold the fundraiser annually to help raise the money to send that team. The people in the Dominican live in very difficult situations and we are just trying to help."

In order to help, the group must raise enough money to send volunteers. The annual dinner, show and auction is the group's biggest fundraiser, raising \$35,000 last year.

Jenni French, the show's previous director, watched for years as Josh Powers constantly came up with creative, fresh ideas.

"I was exhausted from the show, so I decided to leave him in charge," French said. "Josh came up with the idea of a talk show theme and he wanted me to play Oprah. I told him I am not [playing Oprah, that's like asking someone to play Jesus. So we decided to] make our own talk show and invent our own host."

Enter the character Traci Basic, the host of the DR Team's talk show. Basic parades around with a "I'm the prettiest, smartest girl in the world" attitude as she interviews celebrities and audience members. Basic, who is played by French, traveled to the Dominican in November and is the star of the Grammy video.

Josh Powers got the idea for the video after watching Black Eyed Peas perform at Oprah's 24th Anniversary special, when all of Michigan Avenue in Chicago danced in unison.

"The video took a lot of planning," Josh Powers said. "I called a friend that lives in the Dominican and asked her to get together a good group of kids to be in the video. We spent two to three hours shooting the four-minute video."

While the video has received thousands of YouTube hits and has been seen by the likes of Beyonce, Lady Gaga and Taylor Swift, Josh Powers hasn't lost touch of his original goal.

"I have grown up helping people," Josh Powers said. "I have had a passion for that. My goal is to use my expertise in producing and media to try and bring in as many people to the fundraiser as I can. The more people at the fundraiser, the more people that we can help and in the end, that is always the goal."



Above: Wallingford's Rebekah Powers, 10, with a child in the Dominican Republic.



Left: Members of the DR Mission Team dig a foundation for a house they are building in Batey La Higuera, Dominican Republic.

To view the video and learn more about the Dominican Republic Mission Team fundraiser, visit www.drmissionteam.org



Above: Wallingford resident Chris Rusate, an RN, examines a little girl at a medical clinic for Haitian sugar cane workers and their families.

Left: Registered nurse Jackie Gilgallon, a nurse at MidState Medical Center in Meriden, examines a patient during a Batey medical clinic in June.

Photos courtesy of John Powers, a member of the DR Mission Team