Gurnee Mills
A Simon Center

Partnership with Business Project

Warren Township High School
Illinois
2017-18
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Introduction

Simon Malls group is a global leader in the ownership of premier shopping, dining, entertainment and mixed-use destinations. Their properties are across North America, Europe, and Asia providing community gathering places for millions of people every day and generating billions of dollars in annual sales. After meeting with Elizabeth Striegel, Marketing Director for Gurnee Mills, Warren Township FBLA’s Partnership with Business Committee felt we could collaborate to form a mutually beneficial partnership.

Gurnee Mills is the largest “full-price and outlet” shopping destination in Illinois. Gurnee Mills provides the ultimate indoor shopping experience with nearly 200 stores including household names like Macy’s, Forever 21, Kohl’s, Bed Bath & Beyond/Buy Buy Baby and Bass Pro Shops Outdoor World. Shoppers can dine at great restaurants like Chicago Woodfire Pizza, catch a movie at Gurnee Marcus Cinema, or enjoy indoor miniature golf and laser tag at Tilt Studio.

Mrs. Striegel expressed a need for positive, hard-working, and professional volunteers to help with events held at the mall throughout the year. Mrs. Striegel also requested that members help her with marketing tasks for the organization. In September, the partnership scheduled events to help promote holiday spirit within the mall. As soon as the partnership began, goals were set by the co-chairs, and were measured and adjusted throughout the partnership.

Main Goals of the Partnership

1. **Improve our members’ marketing skills and knowledge of the mall industry.** Many of our members are unsure of plans post-graduation. To help them make a more informed decision, we set a goal to give our members first-hand knowledge and exposure to the retail industry with marketing skills and customer service.

2. **Supply Gurnee Mills with volunteers to execute events, as well as develop new events as a chapter to address the mall’s changing needs.** Gurnee Mills expressed the need for volunteers and new events in their mall, so we made it a priority to meet this need.

3. **Involve at least 50% of our chapter in the project.** As a chapter of 267 members, we hoped to host events that would encourage many different members to participate.
Roles

Business Leaders

After contacting Mrs. Elizabeth Striegel, Director of Marketing and Business Development of Gurnee Mills, she was excited to establish a partnership after hearing the committee’s goals and objectives. Additionally, committee leads met Mrs. Striegel’s assistant, Mrs. Castrejon, the Marketing Administrator. Mrs. Striegel and Mrs. Castrejon serve as the liaisons between our FBLA chapter and the Gurnee Mills Mall.

Mrs. Striegel was able to speak at our chapter’s Lunch and Learn: an extended lunch period where business professionals in the area speak to our members. Mrs. Striegel talked about her career and the road to her current job. Additionally, Mrs. Striegel gave us three pieces of advice for our careers ahead. She highlighted the importance of standing out, participation, and continuous learning in the professional world.

Co-leads spoke at a monthly staff meeting, and were introduced to several other business leaders within the mall. The employees gave feedback and suggestions for the project that expanded the knowledge of the co-leads. The employees included Timothy J Ryter, Director of Operations; Tracy Salerno, Specialty Leasing Manager; and Randy Ebertowski, General Manager. Mr. Ebertowski approached the co-leads shortly after the meeting asking for their help with a future recycling project in Gurnee Mills.

Chapter Members

Even though the committee leads were the foundation of this project, the committee members were the ones who put the ideas into action by furthering opportunities for Gurnee Mills and our chapter. At the committee meetings, hosted by committee leads, members gathered to discuss goals, impact, and ideas for the partnership. Before partnering with our chapter, Gurnee Mills struggled to find enough volunteers, our members resolved this problem, allowing Gurnee Mills to seamlessly execute events.
Development and Planning

Objective

During our partnership with Gurnee Mills, Warren FBLA set clear goals for the project. The committee was dedicated to helping members discover opportunities in the retail industry, as well as providing the mall with assistance in the fulfillment of their projects and publicity events.

Real-world experience gained from executing the events assigned to our committee allowed our members to implement their business skills. Students involved in the project expanded their talents as planned for several high-attendance events, spoke with customers, and interacted with children and parents. Members quickly realized the importance of making effective business connections.

While firsthand experience is beneficial, insight from a professional can provide separate and unique advantages. Members with career interests other than business had a chance to learn from professionals in several other careers, such as event coordinators and security personnel.

Planning

At a local community event over the summer, members were introduced to Mrs. Striegel and were encouraged to contact her for future opportunities. As school began and the project was established, project leads discussed possible ways to make this partnership successful. At monthly chapter meetings, FBLA-lunch activity period, and on social media, the word spread about this partnership. Committee leads held several committee meetings to discuss ideas on how Gurnee Mills could benefit our chapter as well. During this time, we had numerous conversations with Mrs. Striegel on what events the chapter wanted to pursue through the partnership. After planning our first event, we felt confident that this partnership would become a success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Members Participating</th>
<th>Hours Spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santa’s Arrival Event</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gift Wrapping Station Event</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter Set Up</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch and Learn</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour Event</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Meetings</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Production</td>
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<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>174</strong></td>
<td><strong>106</strong></td>
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Implementation

Santa’s Arrival Event

Gurnee Mills hosted an annual event at the mall where Santa and his Elves arrived on a holiday train to the delight of children and parents. Our members assisted at this event by passing out hot cocoa to the children and by approaching parents to sign up for Gurnee Mills’ new email list. Our members acted as Santa’s helpers and were required to wear Christmas-themed clothing. Twelve members from the Warren FBLA chapter helped at this holiday event and worked for five hours. During this period, members were able to develop their customer service skills when speaking and interacting with mall visitors. Additionally, members had the opportunity to experience the planning and execution of a large-scale event in the retail industry.

Gift Wrapping Event

For the past several years, during the holiday season, organizations in the area participate in a gift-wrapping fundraiser for Gurnee Mills. Representatives of these organizations donate their time to assist mall shoppers with holiday shopping by wrapping their presents in exchange for a donation. This event also serves as a fundraiser for each participating organization as the groups receive 50 percent of all money raised during their time at the kiosks. The remaining money is donated to the Simon Youth Foundation which creates opportunities for students to further their education. Our FBLA chapter donated two days, with six hours each day, to help shoppers. Twenty-four members were utilized in several shifts for this event. While working the kiosk, members were in constant interaction with customers, thus improving their marketing and customer service skills.

Easter Set Up

Most recently, seven members assisted in the Easter setup in the mall. Mrs. Castrejon needed help carrying various props and materials from the mall storage rooms into the area for the event. Members witnessed the large storage rooms in the mall and all the different materials that a mall needs. Members were then asked to help transform a section of the mall into an Easter wonderland. In just four hours the Easter set up was complete and was ready for the big day. Mrs. Castrejon was grateful for the help of the Warren FBLA members.
Behind-the-Scenes Tour

After working side by side with Gurnee Mills at several events, the company wanted to do something in return for our chapter. Mrs. Striegel approached the chapter with an idea for a behind-the-scenes tour of the mall. Julia and Nihad opened the opportunity to our entire chapter, where anyone could sign up to attend. Fifteen members signed up and all attended the tour.

On May 4, 2018, 15 members and one adviser met at Gurnee Mills for the tour. Mrs. Striegel and Mrs. Castrejon were the main coordinators of the tour, but many other employees of Gurnee Mills were introduced and spoke to the group. At the beginning of the tour, Mrs. Striegel spoke about the process of new tenants coming in and old tenants moving out. For example, the tenant “Sports Authority” recently moved out and is being replaced by “Dick’s Sporting Goods”. Mrs. Striegel explained the leasing process for all tenants, including in-line stores, kiosks, and anchor stores.

The group was then taken through the back hallways of the mall and observed the boiler rooms. These rooms are what control the heating and cooling of the whole mall. Dean Jariston, head of Maintenance, showed the group the giant pipes filled with cold water that cool the whole mall. The tour ended with going into the security department of the mall. The members saw the screens with the different camera angles and got to see the mall jail cells. Because Gurnee Mills is the half-way point between East and West Gurnee, these jail cells are used for the Gurnee Police Department to hold criminals while processing them.

When wrapping up the tour Mrs. Striegel showed the members the mall’s new marketing strategy. This strategy incorporated two walls with a unique wallpaper and the hashtag “#OOTD”. This hashtag stands for outfit of the day, and this marketing technique is aimed towards mall visitors to take selfies at this location and post them to social media to increase awareness of the mall.
Evidence of Publicity

Social Media

Throughout the project, social media was utilized to stay connected with our members and keep people updated on our project. Project chairs created an Instagram account with the tag “FBLAGURNEEMILLS” and used it to share pictures of the project with the community. The Instagram account allowed the project to grow within Warren Township High School and become more popular. A Facebook page was also created with the title “Gurnee Mills FBLA” and was used to provide reminders and updates regarding the progress of the project.

Recognition

Gurnee Mills and our chapter have recognized this project in several ways during the project. After each volunteer event a letter was sent from Gurnee Mills to the committee leads and advisers (Appendix A). These letters provided satisfaction for committee leads and members, as all were thanked for their help with the fulfillment of the events. Furthermore, Mrs. Striegel sent a press release regarding the project to Gurnee Mill’s PR agency. This press release will be spread through flyers, newsletters, and newspapers after being proofed by the agency.

Additionally, after the events were conducted, an article was published through the school district’s to inform the community of our work within the partnership. A brief description of the project, along with two pictures were released on our district website (Appendix A). A press release was sent to local newspapers and will be published in the coming weeks.

Once the article about the partnership was published on our D121 website, the project started to gain more attention. The project’s Instagram account gained almost 50 more followers. Furthermore, school staff and students became more interested in the project and word of the partnership quickly spread. Committee leads were overwhelmed at first with the newfound praise for the project but were grateful for the new opportunities that the recognition would bring. The committee leads are constantly looking for new ways to become recognized in the community.
Results

Goals Fulfilled

At the beginning of the partnership, goals were set into place to be used as a guideline to follow throughout the project. The committee’s goals were to enhance their members marketing skills, help Gurnee Mills with their need of volunteers for events and have at least 50 percent of our chapter involved. These goals were met through committee meetings, volunteer events and with Mrs. Striegel speaking to the members about advice for future careers.

Our second goal was to supply Gurnee Mills with volunteers to successfully execute their events. Gurnee Mills offered three events at which our members could volunteer at. These events allowed for Gurnee Mills to have extra man-power when executing and designing the mall activities.

Our third goal was to involve at least 50 percent of our chapter throughout the project. The Warren FBLA chapter has a membership of 267 members, but with the members who attended the committee meetings, volunteered at events, watched Mrs. Striegel’s speech, and attended the tour, the committee had a total of 140 different members involved with this project. The Partnership Committee successfully involved 52 percent of the Warren Township FBLA chapter; thus achieving the third and final goal.

Opportunity

In late April, Nihad Mokkath and Julia Paukert had the opportunity to speak to the lead employees of Gurnee Mills at a staff meeting. A variety of employees attended, ranging from the head of security to the General Manager. At the meeting, Nihad and Julia presented the project and delivered individual copies of their report. Team members were all impressed with the work the Partnership Committee accomplished, and look forward to continuing this partnership for years to come.
Skills Improved

Discovery

Committee leads quickly discovered that the implementation of these events enhanced members’ communication, marketing, and time management skills. It also provided members with the opportunity to experience the mall industry from a business standpoint, thus achieving one of our major goals.

Resources: At both events resources played a huge role in the success of the event. At the Santa’s Arrival Event, members had to make sure there was a constant supply of hot cocoa for all the kids to drink and that an email list was always close by. During the Gift Wrapping Event, members had to stock wrapping paper in every color, as well as scissors, and tape.

Time Management: Time management skills were also refined as time played a crucial role in both events. When walking through the mall during the Santa’s Arrival Event members had to keep track of the time and their pace to make sure they would get through the entire mall on time. Also, during the Gift-Wrapping event members had to keep track of time when wrapping a customer’s present to not anger or frustrate the customer and to provide the best quality service.

Key Skills

Marketing: At the Santa’s Arrival Event members had to market Gurnee Mills indirectly by providing this form of entertainment to mall patrons and encouraged parents to sign up for Gurnee Mill’s email list. During the Gift Wrapping Event our members had to sell as many wrapped presents as possible by using different strategies.

Most importantly, project members learned to engage with families in the community. Through the events, they learned to adapt to an area’s surroundings as each event is held in a different space. The emphasis of leadership and teamwork was stressed during each presentation. Lastly, Gurnee Mills taught members about careers in business and the retail industry.
Impact

Benefits

When evaluating the project, many benefits were gained for both parties in the partnership. Our Warren FBLA chapter gained the knowledge of the retail industry as well as marketing skills. Mrs. Striegel taught our members that to be successful in events you must use three questions as a guideline: How does the event promote traffic to the mall; once the consumers are at the event are they encouraged to dine, shop and seek the entertainment opportunities; do the consumers have a good experience when they come to the mall. These were key questions to consider at our committee meetings while generating our own event. Not only did our members learn the strategies for conducting an event, but they also learned time-management and customer service skills.

Members were asked to step out of their comfort zones when gathering consumers at the gift-wrapping event. As for the future events, members will continue to improve customer service skills through planned events. Throughout the partnership, members successfully met our second goal of improving our members marketing skills and knowledge of the retail industry.

Lastly, committee leads Nihad Mokkath and Julia Paukert, had the experience to be a role model to the members, and the opportunity to reach out to a local business for the partnership. They wanted to seize this opportunity within their FBLA chapter to gain valuable skills within the business world. Skills like organization and time management were improved upon through their leadership roles. An added benefit was increased knowledge of social media and event planning.

Evaluation

After evaluating this project, the co-leads came to realize that there are many areas of the partnership that could be improved upon if this project were to be repeated. The first is the planning stage of the project. The co-leads suggest that future leads must organize the maximum number of events early in the partnership to promote a more successful project. Another suggestion is to take pictures of everything. Pictures are useful when looking back and evaluating the project. Julia and Nihad realized this after discovering that only two pictures were taken at their first event. With these suggestions, future leads will conduct a more successful partnership.
Hours and Future Goals

Breakdown of Hours

Looking back, several hours of work were put into this project. The three events for which we provided volunteers along with a behind the scenes tour came to a total of 25 hours. The lunch and learn Mrs. Striegel gave to our students was an additional hour in length. Our several committee meetings came to a total of four hours. Lastly, the total hours of planning, implementing, updating social media, and meetings with Mrs. Striegel’s team and advisers came to a total of 77 hours. To date, our project has a total of 106 hours.

Plans

During the meeting in late April, when committee leads Julia Paukert and Nihad Mokkath spoke to lead staffers, the committee leads asked Mrs. Streigel and the other business leaders if there were any other events this year that needed helpers. The event is the Fire Safety Expo, which is their largest event of the year with over 1200 attendees and will take place during the last weekend of May.

The committee leads then brought forward the idea of an event that would be entirely planned by our committee that would be conducted in Gurnee Mills. This event would provide the chapter with event planning skills and would expose members to all the different aspects that go into a high attendance event. This event would also benefit Gurnee Mills as the main goal for the event would be to drive potential customers into the mall or promote Gurnee Mills in some form. Mrs. Striegel and her assistant loved the idea for the event and possible events were then brainstormed. The group concluded that a Survey Event could be conducted in the mall. A future meeting was planned where the committee leads would present the completed plans for the events.

At the end of the meeting, committee leads were approached by Gurnee Mill’s General Manager, Randy Ebertowski. He expressed a problem that the mall was facing year after year: recycling. He requested us to talk to our members, and meet back with possible ideas in July.
Appendix A: Recognition

January 25, 2018

Ms. Julia Paulkert
Warren Township High School - FBLA
5400 Almond Road
Gurnee, IL 60031

Dear Julie,

A student named Duane was abandoned by his father at a bus stop when he was 15 years old. He had just $50 in his pocket and nowhere to turn. But thanks to your help, Duane is earning his education at a Simon Youth Academy and is on track to graduate from high school.

We at Gurnee Mills thank you for your participation in our Annual Gift Wrap Program. Your support helped us raise more than $2,600 to support Simon Youth Foundation’s (SYF) programs. We could not have hit our goal without your contribution of $35.

You can trust that your gift will be put to good use. In SYF’s 19-year history, they have helped more than 16,000 at-risk youth turn their tassels and become high school graduates.

Your support for SYF’s ongoing efforts to bring hope to children and students throughout our region, and across the United States, is truly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Striegel
Director of Marketing & Business Development

Kelsey Castron
Marketing Administrator

Simon Youth Foundation’s Tax ID Number is: 35-2035289

Above: Thank You Letter from Mrs. Striegel

Left: Letter from Gurnee Mills Administration

Talking about the Simon Youth Foundation

Feature Article Presented on the School Website