

Design program gives back to young locals

SeeSaw Studios celebrates 12 years of developing tomorrow's designers

By John Hamlin
UNC Staff Writer

Shana Tucker didn't just get an outstanding T-shirt design at SeeSaw Studios — she enabled senior Kimani Hall to bolster his application to N.C. State University.

When the after-school design and entrepreneurship program marked its 12th year with a fundraiser, Tucker gladly lent her musical talent.

The celebration drew about 210 supporters who donated \$2,503 at Fullsteam Brewery on Saturday Jan. 29. The live music, gourmet food and in-house beer had guests dancing by the end of the night.

The name SeeSaw, like the charity itself, serves double duty, said Executive Director Michelle Gonzales. While expressing the design concept of seeing something and making it, it also illustrates the practical, pecuniary need to balance creativity and business.

"Our mission is to prepare them for careers, to prepare them for college, to take their god-given talent and help them to use it at their best capacity so that they can create the most opportunity for their future as adults," said Gonzales.

"That's what makes SeeSaw unique: We are not just a nice arts program. We are a program that also brings in business mentors to help them with

Photo courtesy of UNC business plans, **Executive Director Michelle Gonzales** logos, taglines and marketing."

But SeeSaw can only afford to serve 30 teens, leaving many budding, young designers on the waiting list.

"We are at capacity, but that's not from a lack of space; it's from a lack of funding," she said.

"The board's goal this year is to double our funding base so we can serve twice as many kids next year."

Tucker, who recently commissioned SeeSaw to design a T-shirt promoting her new album, said the teens deliver exceptional service and quality.

"It's perfect. It's perfect in so many ways," Tucker said. "These T-shirts



Staff photo by John Hamlin

Shana Tucker plays guitar and sings at SeeSaw's fundraiser on Saturday, Jan. 29, 2011. The charity created a T-shirt design for her late last year.

are limited edition, but I absolutely want them to design my merch[andise] stuff."

SeeSaw gets money from contracts like Tucker's and some grants, but the program relies mostly on individual donations for support. To keep operating costs low, Gonzales is the only full-time employee, so the charity relies heavily on volunteer labor.

Some volunteers are program graduates who continue to benefit from association with the program, recent SeeSaw alumnus Anthony Lashley said.

"It's basically a win-win situation where I get to learn new processes and also teach them to other people," the 19-year-old said.

Based on Tucker's own experience in graphic design apprenticeship and education, she said SeeSaw's dedication to marketable skills sets it apart from expensive schools.

"The goal is not that you're as creative as possible; the goal is that your creativity fits your clients' needs," she said.

"A lot of designers will come out of a university and be hit with the reality that the stuff that was wonderful in

school — there's no place for it in real life."

Another hallmark of the program is its success in unifying a diverse group of teens while still addressing specific needs, said Kitty Moses, mother of SeeSaw alumna Julie.

"Michelle's incredible about seeing the value in every single person, absolutely no questions asked, and...what they need," Moses said.

The program's diversity helped Julie avoid teenagers' tendency to label one another and break into cliques, Moses said.

"You go through high school and things tend to get kind of segregated and stereotypes start kicking in," she said.

"Then, working with some of these kids, the stereotypes got kicked to the side and she's back to where she started, which is seeing people for who they are."

MORE ONLINE

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