



Beating a Charitable Drum

HOUGH HIGH SENIOR
EKIN AYGEN CHAMPIONS
NON-PROFIT

by Tony Ricciardelli | photography by Jamie Cowles

The gratification that comes from helping others can be most rewarding. Empathy and kindness can lift and inspire individuals and provide hope to those in need—perhaps more than we are aware. For Hough High School senior, Ekin Aygen, compassion toward others and keen social awareness summoned her to step up and make a difference. As a freshman in 2018, Aygen, with the help of her parents, established Heart-2-Heart Charity, a non-profit with a mission to raise money for children in need.

"If you want your voice to be heard, stand up for what you believe in," says Aygen. "Advocate for those who can't advocate for themselves and surpass the expectation that others place upon you."

Since its inception, the non-profit has supported organizations like Children's Hope Alliance, and it's expanded its efforts to include partnering with elder care facilities, providing food and clothing to Charlotte's homeless, collecting goods for families. Aygen is constantly looking to broaden the non-profit's philanthropic endeavors. Possibilities include working with animal rescue organizations and partnering with women's shelters.

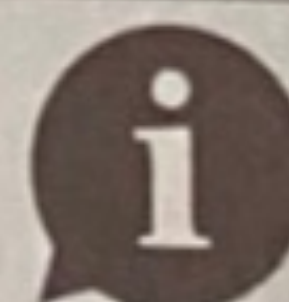
"I'm also looking for Heart-2Heart to take an active role in protecting the environment," she states emphatically. "We have a responsibility to care for the planet, and the environmental situation is worsening. I see this as a challenge, where Heart-2-Heart can make a difference."

As the non-profit's CEO, Aygen oversees a staff of up to twenty

volunteers; she networks with community leaders, and fosters and maintains media relations, handles all monetary matters, and maintains the non-profit website and social media accounts. Through her managerial experience and personal growth, Aygen's self-awareness is evident: "I'm a determined leader, organizer, and an advocate for those in need. It takes determination and dedication to spark change. It is never easy, but it can be done, one step at a time."

Somehow, Aygen does find time for academics, hobbies, and personal interests. She plays the piano and guitar, and she sings. Her musical flair can be seen in her YouTube videos. She also enjoys recreational soccer, baking, and spending time with her family.

"My inspiration," she says, "comes from my parents and younger sister, who taught me that love and kindness are unconditional." Aygen is looking forward to attending college, where she may study business administration or entrepreneurship. "I'm looking for a school whose values match my beliefs. If possible, I'd like to stay local and maybe attend Chapel Hill or Wake Forest." This young humanitarian is unwavering in her belief that human beings must care for one another. As she moves toward life on a college campus, where will her humanity take her? Most likely, it will take her wherever there are people in need. ■



To learn more about **Heart-2-Heart**, visit heart2heartnonprofit.com