



The Republican.

MassMutual interns learn, contribute

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SPRINGFIELD - When MassMutual Financial Group, a \$500 billion company, wanted to know what blogs written by and for mothers with young children were saying about life insurance, they turned to 17-year-old Sara A. Ekmalian.

Ekmalian, a senior at the Springfield Renaissance School, trolled cyberspace for the so-called "mommy bloggers" and then plotted her findings on a huge chart for her bosses to review

She's also contacted media outlets all over the country to update distribution lists for news releases.

"I really enjoy communicating with people," she said. "I hadn't really thought about marketing and public relations as a career, but now it is something I'd like to pursue."

That's exactly the sentiment MassMutual wants to hear from the 14 high school interns working at the company this fall.

"We really want them to think about opportunities in financial services. Or they might be thinking about these careers, but they think they exist only in some faraway place like Boston or New York," said Nicholas A. Fyntrilakis, MassMutual assistant vice president for community responsibility and state government relations. "They might go past our building every day and not know what we do here."

The company draws its interns from the ranks of the MassMutual Academic Achievers program, who have all achieved a grade average of a B or better for four consecutive marking periods. All the interns are seniors in Springfield's high schools.

Fyntrilakis, who is a former member of the city's School Committee, said interns earn \$10 an hour over the 100-hour program. The company administers it through a grant to the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County.

Interns are interviewed by a team of MassMutual executives.

"They give these kids a full corporate experience from start to finish," said Karen J. Lavariere-Sanchez, a director of corporate public relations at MassMutual Financial Group and Ekmalian's supervisor. "We have to prepare a work plan for them, and they get a performance review."

Andre N. Skeene, a senior at the High School of Science and Technology, is spending his internship in the company's computer systems department, helping to troubleshoot and install new software on MassMutual desktops and laptops.

"It's taught me a lot of things I'm going to want to do with my own computer," Skeene said. "I'm also learning how to speak and act in a corporate environment."