

Easing student debt

Website connects youths with others willing to help

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Tempestt Hazel graduated from Columbia College with \$25,000 in student loans and a keen awareness that she was going to need to start paying them off if she didn't head straight to graduate school.

So the Bronzeville resident put herself on Lily's List, an online student loan registry.

"I see it as a kick-starter, an online resource for people to get creative process funding," said Hazel, who studied art history and visual arts management and is currently working on a non-profit start-up archiving local contemporary art projects. "You get people to come and donate different amounts toward your cause."

She said she has received a few small anonymous donations toward her loans, which she said was "shocking, though it could have very well been family members."

Lily's List is an Internet startup designed by a group of suburban Riverside moms to provide debt-laden graduates a way to get help paying off their debt. The Project on Student Debt estimated in 2008 the average student loan load for graduating seniors was \$23,200.

At *lily'slist.com*, family and friends — or even a generous anonymous benefactor — can direct gifts toward debt instead of writing a check or buying a sweater for birthdays or graduation.

Joining Hazel in asking for help on Lily's List are a Minnesota law school graduate with \$20,000 in unsubsidized loans who wants to be a priest but doesn't want his loans to accrue interest while he is in the seminary; a Tennessee man looking to pay off \$4,500 in loans so he can start an import/export business, and a New York-based writer and editor who offers writing and editing to charitable organizations at reduced rates.



Tempestt Hazel, a recent Columbia College graduate, has had luck with Lily's List.

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dress or a keg of beer, it's going to go someplace," said Beverly Gibson of Riverside, who is working with Lily's List.

Lily's List joins *Education*

registry.com and *uponourstar.com*, two other online student loan registries. Those websites target engaged couples or new parents who would rather register for their student loans or for their child's future education than standard wedding or new baby gifts.

"This speaks to what a burden this is for people," said Edie Irons of the Institute for College Access and Success. "Most people aren't going to be able to zero out their student loan debt this way, but it could make a real difference for people. It could be more helpful than a blender or microwave or crockpot."

Irons said in the age of increasing student debt loads, asking for help isn't the same as shirking responsibility.

"I think any way people can find to pay back their student loans is fair game," she said.