the pieces started coming together. We realized we
could do a project using this process.”

That same year Lin and a group of her fifth-grade
friends launched Turn Grease Into Fuel (TGIF)—a
community-run program that takes used grease
and cooking oil from local restaurants and trans-
ports it to a local refinery, where it’s then converted
into biofuel. These days TGIF brings in more than
5,000 gal. of grease per month from participating
restaurants—helping to heat about 80 homes a
year. “We got a small group of restaurants to agree,
and it just kept growing,” says Lin, now 20, who
also helped spearhead local and state legislation to
regulate oil disposal. “It’s a great project,” says
Rose McGuire, who manages the Back Track Bar
& Grille in Westerly, which has been one of TGIF’s
regular donors. “They don’t ask for anything in
return, and it helps local families.”

Now a junior at Stanford University in Palo Alto,
Calif., Lin still oversees TGIF’s daily efforts with
help from a local nonprofit called Westerly Innovations
Network (w-i-n.ws)—and remains dedicated
to promoting recycling and environmentally safe oil
disposal. “Used cooking oil clogs septic and munic-
ipal sewer systems and leads to environmental pol-
lution,” she says. “It’s very powerful to feel that we’ve
helped make a difference.”

—SUSAN KEATING

Turning
Cooking Oil
into Fuel

CASSANDRA LIN LAUNCHED ‘TURN GREASE
INTO FUEL’—AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SAFE PROGRAM
THAT PROVIDES HEAT TO NEEDY FAMILIES

By the time she was 10 years old,
Cassandra Lin knew she wanted to
help other people. Inspired by her
older brother Alex, now 25, who
was involved in community service,
Lin saw her own chance to make a difference after
reading about impoverished families who went
without heat in her hometown of Westerly, R.I.
“It shocked me,” says Lin, who, not long after, in
September 2008, visited an expo exhibit about how
cooking oil could be converted to fuel. “That’s when

Team TGIF
“My friends and
I formed a team,”
says Lin (far left,
with her TGIF pals
at a festival in
Westerly in 2011).
“We wanted to
help our local
community and the
environment.”

A Voice for
Change
“It’s important
to look at what
drives you and
follow that,” says
Lin, a L’Oréal Paris
Women of Worth
honoree in 2017.
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