

# SCHOOLS

8 THE BUGLE JANUARY 20, 2011

## Pre-teens learning to build up future communities

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Staff reporter

Area pre-teens are being given an opportunity to help out in ways that affect not only their neighbors but those around the world, teaching early on what it takes to be a leader.

In a history-making move, through a partnership of the DuPage County Area Project (DuCAP) and the Romeoville/Bolingbrook Kiwanis club, five Builder Clubs were opened and chartered in all Valley View School District Middle Schools.

As Executive Director of DuCAP and the President of the Kiwanis Club, Jimmy Barber was in a unique position to bring the ideas and resources of both groups together. The group Teens in Action was already formed through DuCAP, but Barber felt it needed to be expanded and saw no better way than to take

advantage of systems set up with the Kiwanis Club.

Last year, more than 45,000 middle and junior high school students around the world were involved in the program, developing leadership skills while working to help others in need. Projects ranged from fundraising for HIV/AIDS prevention in Africa to recycling drives to cleaning up parks.

"We were able to merge the two groups together and expand this philosophy to the schools," said Barber. "While we had a group in place, this takes it further. I wanted them to feel they are part of something bigger; that they aren't on an island by themselves."

An extension of the Kiwanis Key Clubs in the high schools, the Builders Club brings the same ideas to the middle school set. As students maneuver this "in-between-stage" of life, the

mission of the Builders Club is for them to be able to empower themselves, work together with friends, and implement plans through action. As an extension of Kiwanis International, Builders Club shares the mission of the building leaders to help children around the world.

The program was piloted last year and the groups began the behind-the-scenes work with school principals and volunteers to get the project moving. Because of the double pool of resources, volunteers and funds, through the partnership the Builders Club were able to reach all middle schools, a feat Barber says has never been done at one time.

"Pulling this together in one year is quite an endeavor," said Barber. "In fact, Kiwanis International is looking at our work here as a model for others clubs to use—sort of a best

practice for getting the most bang out of your buck."

More than 250 individuals came out to Romeoville High School to officially name and charter the Builders Clubs for each of the schools. The first Builders Club was chartered in 1975, and today there are more than 1,200 clubs in places like Australia, the Bahamas, Canada, Italy, Jamaica, Korea, Martinique, Netherlands Antilles, Philippines, and the United States.

The five middle school clubs have been operational since September 2010, and are already more than 100 members strong, and making their presence known in the community. Members have participated in projects like Take Back the Night, Ready Set Ride, and Power Connection's Food and Clothing Pantry; wrapped gifts for kids and worked at Breakfast with Santa with DuPage Township;

volunteered at the Ditka Dome Haunted House; and made posters for Martin Luther King Day.

Participants were treated to a movie night and heard from guest speakers from the Bolingbrook Fire Department. Next up will be volunteering at an animal shelter, raising money for cancer, and participating as teams in the Bolingbrook and Romeoville Relays for Life.

The group has partnered with both Romeoville and Bolingbrook Key Clubs to create mentorships between the members. Organizers say this will help grow the Key Clubs as well as allow the middle school students to walk into their high school on their first day knowing a high school student.

You can follow the club online at [www.facebook.com/DuCapKiwanisBuildersClub](http://www.facebook.com/DuCapKiwanisBuildersClub) and on Twitter at @TeensInAction.