

## Education Matters

### Middle School Students Learn from Character Building and Citizenship

By **MATTHEW BLOCK**  
Assistant Principal, Edison Intermediate School

It often seems that those who don't work with adolescents find it hard to understand why anyone would.

After all, if given the opportunity, how many of us would want to re-live our early teenage years in middle or junior high school? For most people, thoughts of adolescence are riddled with visions of physical awkwardness and social tumult.

While these elements are still factors for young teenagers, the adults who work with this age group will tell you that adolescence is also a time filled with a great deal of excitement, possibility and promise.

It is a time when young people begin to define themselves, search for their place in the world and start out on a path toward their futures. While it takes a wealth of energy and patience to guide these young people in the right direction, middle school educators recognize that the early steps of a student's journey potentially have the greatest effect on where the journey will lead them.

This mantra is what motivates and energizes the staff at both of Westfield's middle schools: to provide students with educational experiences that foster strong character, promote community involvement and advocate active citizenship.

Learning the importance of community involvement, strong character and active citizenship starts early in middle school. Each holiday season, all of Edison School's sixth graders adopt a family in need of financial assistance.

Each homeroom class spends time learning about their "adopted" family. Students then work cooperatively to design a collection box. With the encouragement of other students, these boxes are filled with canned food, new clothes, blankets, gloves and other winter necessities.

Just before winter break, our sixth grade teachers load up their cars and take the items directly to the people who will use them. Our students feel proud of what they accomplish, and learn through experience that giving can be even better than receiving.

Moreover, they learn that they have the power to make an impact on others' lives by taking action to reach out and help people they may not even know.

Throughout their three years in middle school, students learn about citizenship both in and out of the classroom. Each year all of Westfield's eighth graders participate in Project Citizen, a national civic-education program for which students are required to identify real problems in their community.

They research one problem they think is especially significant, identify and explore possible solutions, choose a viable solution based on research and devise an implementation plan to get their solution enacted.

Students had the opportunity last year to share their ideas with other middle school students from around the state at the New Jersey Project Citizen Showcase. As part of this project, middle school students deal with issues of public policy in serious ways, and their solutions to problems are creative and logical.

In the process, they learn that, to solve community problems they must be active, involved and informed citizens.

A similar concept was added to our extra-curricular program this year with a

club called E-Cyber Mission. The purpose of this all-volunteer club is to propose a solution to a real problem in the community and use math or technology to solve it.

The sixth graders in the club wanted to help the community by offering computer lessons to senior citizens. After advertising with AARP and inviting seniors into the school, they already provided computer instruction to five senior citizens, who have overwhelmingly praised their student-instructors.

Students, who assign the adults homework to practice the skills they learned, tutor the seniors. This has shown our students that you can make a positive difference in the community one person at a time by sharing skills and talents.

It is no accident that both Edison and Roosevelt Intermediate Schools have thriving student governments. Each year, under the guidance of dedicated faculty advisors, the elected leaders of these organizations plan and implement successful events that cultivate students' connection to the school community.

The most impressive part of what these students do is donate their hard-earned money to worthy charities. Last year alone, Westfield's middle school students donated more than \$30,000 to charity through their student government organizations.

Students began the 2005-2006 school year running a backpack drive to send school supplies directly to students in Louisiana and Mississippi who were affected by Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, our student government quickly raised \$4000, and made a donation to the American Red Cross Katrina relief efforts.

This year, every one of our students has met the founder of The Little Rock Foundation, a New Jersey-based charity that provides resources and programs for visually impaired children.

The Little Rock Foundation will receive this year's donations. As our students participate in their annual Spirit Week activities, they will be focused on the positive impact their participation will have on the greater community.

These are just a few examples of how our middle school educators work to provide experiences, both within and beyond the curriculum, that point our students in a positive direction toward adulthood. Martin Luther King said, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education."

Middle school is a challenging, but exciting time for our students. Educators at Westfield's middle schools not only work hard to provide students with an outstanding academic program, but understand the need and the value of working both in and out of the classroom to give our students opportunities to practice good citizenship and participate in their community.

While it is impossible to know whether our students, 20 years from now, will say that they would opt to re-live their middle school years, I strongly believe that the meaningful formative experiences provided by Westfield's middle schools will serve as a solid foundation on which to build caring adults who will contribute, in positive and significant ways, to our local, national, and global communities.



**WHAT SHE WORE...**Holocaust survivor Luna Kaufman shows W-H middle school pupils the prison dress stamped with a number that she was forced to wear in the concentration camps.

### Holocaust Survivor Luna Kaufman Details Experience

AREA - When speaking about her experience as a Holocaust survivor, Luna Kaufman told middle school students at The Wardlaw-Hartridge School in Edison that they should never sit quietly by when witnessing atrocities.

Instead, they must take action against them. "You must stretch out a hand to others of different heritage and customs," she said. "Everyone has something unique to contribute to life."

Mrs. Kaufman's visit on the afternoon of Tuesday, January 30, brought tears to the eyes of faculty and staff members, as well as tons of astute questions posed by approximately 35 students filled the lecture hall.

A native of Kraków, Poland, where her family dates back at least to the 1700s, Mrs. Kaufman survived three concentration camps with her mother. However, her father and sister did not survive the Holocaust. She was 12 when the war broke out, having already experienced prejudice as one of only three other Jews attending school.

Mrs. Kaufman, who is now 80 years old (her maiden name was Luna Fuss), told the pupils that she had to abandon Kraków with meager possessions to now live in "the ghetto," which was crowded.

She and her family were forced to live in a two-room apartment with an Orthodox family in what she described as "very primitive conditions." She lost contact with family members during what she called "a very trying period."

In response to questions posed by eighth graders Peter Minium of Scotch Plains and Ian English of Cranford, Mrs. Kaufman informed the students that a very small supply

of food was brought to them in a ghetto that was fenced off.

That gate still stands to this day. She added that a Christian woman, who would toss bundles of money to them as she was passing through, was beaten for her generosity. Yet, she still persisted to give them as much money as she could to help them survive.

She recalled how a Nazi commandant, particularly known for his cruelty, held a gun to her head while she was working in the factory. He spared her life because no one protested. Normally, she noted, if someone protested another's execution, they were immediately killed.

She recalled being 14 the first time she entered a concentration camp, where she witnessed everyone lined up, entering a big room filled with showerheads. She didn't know if they were going to be gassed or showered with water instead. She was given a prison dress that was stamped with a number. She showed that dress to a rapt audience of students and faculty.

Today, Mrs. Kaufman, a local resident, enjoys a large family that ranges from Roman Catholics to Hasidic Jews and every faith in between. She has even kept in touch with a close companion of a concentration camp, who also resides in the area.

Despite the hardships and atrocities she has witnessed and survived, Mrs. Kaufman has not testified against her persecutors. And, regarding the diversity of her family and friends who cherish varied faiths and lifestyles, she said, "We are what we are. We don't judge each other and that's all there is to it."

## THE STUDENT VIEW

The weekly column written by local high school students

### Many Attractions Draw Non-Football Fans to Game

By **ELENA TINFOW**  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Everyone watches the Super Bowl. Well, at least, almost everyone watches the Super Bowl. Either you're a football fan, live in a house with a football fan or want to watch the commercials.

Each year, something interesting happens, whether it is that a team that has not been to the Super Bowl for a long time, or that there is an especially memorable halftime show.

Even though the Super Bowl can be exciting, why is it that those who don't enjoy football come back to the Super Bowl every year? Why do we all gather around the television time and time again for hours?

Each year, many people have parties, where those who may know anything about football can still enjoy the event. Large corporations pay millions of dollars to broadcast their very best advertisements. The most popular musicians are selected to perform at the halftime show. We watch it because the Super Bowl is deeply engrained in our culture.

Everyone throws Super Bowl parties. It gives adults a time where they are not expected to be formal; it is perfectly acceptable to only prepare snack foods and to lounge on couches all night.

Teenagers and children can also have a good excuse to stuff themselves full of good food and to get together with their friends. At least if you are not inviting people to a Super Bowl party, you are the one attending the party.

Another highlight of the Super Bowl is the commercials. After the Super Bowl, many television stations and websites showcase clips not from the football game, but from the advertisements. There are countdowns on shows trying to determine which commercial was the best.

Even if you paid no attention to the football game, you at least saw some of the funny commercials that were

expertly tweaked to perfection.

In addition, the halftime show of the Super Bowl is almost always memorable. Usually, the most popular performers are part of the show, and then the adults can get a taste for the music of the younger generation. If not, then the adults can show the children the music of the adults' time. If you have no interest in the halftime show, you will at least use this time as a break.

Because the Super Bowl involves so much of our culture, we watch it every year. Many have parties to celebrate the event. Even those who do not like football watch the Super Bowl because of the well-known commercials. Others watch the halftime show, which always features performers that are bound to entertain. No matter what, everyone is bound to watch the Super Bowl in some form.

Elena, from Westfield, attends the Union County Magnet High School.

### FW Resident Earns Dean's List Recognition

FANWOOD - Sarah Konzelman of Fanwood made the University of Scranton Dean's List for academic excellence during the 2006 fall semester.

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