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Michele Heights WINs with March Break program

NEWS   Mar 29, 2009   Ottawa East News

Kids at the Michele Heights Community House got involved in improving their community with the help of students in Interact Clubs, the high school version of the Rotary Club. - Margaret Sambol

The basketball courts are clear of ice, bird feeders are hanging in the park and kids are going door-to-door selling baked goods.

Kids from the Michele Heights community worked on improving their own neighbourhood during March Break with help from the Interact Clubs of Bell High School in Nepean and Mackenzie High School in Deep River, Ont. The Interact Club, which is the high school version of the Rotary Club, adapted the Who Is Nobody program to condense it to three days from its typical full school year.

WIN is a character education program that builds self-confidence in kids by getting them involved in charitable projects. The kids start with a doll with no character, called Nobody. As they complete their projects in the community, they add items to Nobody to represent their work.

For example, the kids put plastic gloves on Nobody to represent the work they did to pick up garbage in the community.

"We asked them what they wanted to do in the community and then we thought of projects that would go well," says Victor Malkov, a member of the Bell High School Interact Club.

The kids also wrote letters to the city asking for help with overflowing dumpsters in the community. Other projects included a mobile fundraising bake sale, recycling milk containers into painted bird feeders and de-icing the basketball court.

"If it wasn't cleaned up, (the ice) would melt and there would be water on the court," says Hibo Mousa, a Michele Heights residents who participated in the program.

Hibo says she has been waiting all winter to play basketball.

"We love playing basketball," says Awo Elmi, another participant from Michele Heights.

The Interact youth also asked the kids what characteristics are important to being a good person. Then they brainstormed ways to dress Nobody to show those traits, including a school backpack for intelligence and an IPod playing the song Respect.

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"We were creating stuff for him like backgrounds and shoes," Hibo says.

"We gave him a career," Awo says, adding that Nobody will be a construction worker.

Ben Fleming, another Interact member, explains the students volunteered to help at Michele Heights when a trip to El Salvador was delayed due to political turmoil during the elections there.

"Our club is active in the Who is Nobody program," says Bill Robinson, a member of the Rotary Club of Nepean-Kanata, which sponsors the Bell Interact Club. "We have an Interact Club, we're active in Michele Heights and we had time in March Break. It all came together."

The Interact students are in grades 9 to 12 and the Michele Heights students are in grades 5, 6 and 7.
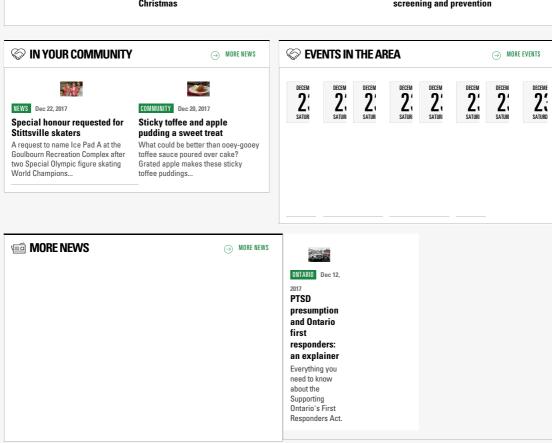
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