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Just Do It

Comments on The Gilbert School Essay Contest

By Charlene LaVoie, Community Lawyer

Solve Problems by Getting Involved, Winsted Needs Citizens to Care, What Can We Do? These titles to essays submitted to the Winsted Voice by The Gilbert School students repeat two common themes: the need for community involvement and more ways to be involved.

Many of the essays focus on encouraging adults to be active participants in the life and structure of the community. Other essays suggest that there are not enough ways in Winsted in which to participate in community life.

Young people who learn that it is part of their responsibility as citizens to participate in community life grow into adults who are willing and active participants in community life. Involved young people become involved adults.

Remember, however, that community involvement is not something that the community does for citizens. It is something citizens do for the community. Therefore, the possibilities for involvement are limitless and age is no barrier.

We can create the opportunities to build community and we are responsible to do so. For example:

Our community access television station, Mad River TV- 13, offers an excellent opportunity for young and adult citizens to learn about the technology of the expanding communications system. The community access coordinator, Par Rasmusson, is eager to teach about cable broadcast technology and how to use the studio equipment. All this at no cost to citizens.

Working as a Mad River TV-13 volunteer also teaches about programming. Understanding how to turn your idea into a program and produce it for television is a powerful tool in community life. It provides an opportunity to share with the community your ideas on community needs and accomplishments.

In 1992 an Eagle Scout candidate and the Student Canvassers from the Office of the Community Lawyer created, wrote, produced, filmed and broadcast a video survey of the worst potholes in Winsted. After learning how to produce the video and surveying for the worst potholes, these community minded young people fixed the potholes with the help of the Town and a private citizen who supplied materials and assistance.

In 1993, citizens planned and built the most creative and beautiful playscape in the area. Young citizens from the elementary and middle schools involved themselves in the effort by raising almost $5,000.00. The Gilbert School students created the logo for the project. Hundreds of adults prepared and built the structures.

In May 1993, the Winsted Design Coalition, dozens of citizens and members of the Yale University School of Architecture participated in a unique town planning weekend which helped citizens design their community. The Winsted Design Coalition will need involved citizens of all ages to move into the implementation phase of the plan for downtown Winsted such as recovering the river bank. Deirdre Dicara and other members of the Coalition want your talents, energy and community spirit.

The owner and editor of the Winsted Voice spoke to high school citizens about newsprint journalism and encouraged them to publish a school newspaper by offering to advise them and to print the publication.

As the Community Lawyer, I am always willing to suggest to citizens, young and adult, ways to exercise their community involvement muscles, have some fun and contribute to strengthening democracy in the community. In addition, many of the essayists had good ideas of their own. You are invited to come to my office and discuss ways of making your ideas a reality.

These are just a few examples of the activities, talents and energies in the community. There are many groups and organizations already in existence and projects underway in which citizens can participate.

But citizens must take responsibility to look for and create ways to be involved. There is always room for new ideas and often the best ideas come from young people. Look around you, think about it, talk about it, seek assistance from each other and adults. It makes you feel good. Just do it!