



January 11, 2009

## Kinawa students enhance their leadership skills

**IN THE GRIPS OF A DISMAL** state economy, it's gratifying and yet humbling, to provide resources for area students. The past couple of years, we've joined Big Brothers Big Sisters as a Meijer Vendor Partner to help support the Wexford Montessori Magnet School in Lansing.

Prior to the opening of the school year, we were able to help Resurrection School and the Waverly Education Foundation, both in Lansing.

This fall, we were able to send a group of students from Kinawa Middle School in Okemos to the Michigan Middle School Leadership Initiative conference at Camp Miniwanca near Shelby, Mich.

This program, administered by the American Youth Foundation, is designed to develop leadership skills by providing leadership tools; increase awareness of civic opportunities for middle school age students; and create an active network of young leaders in Michigan.

For its inaugural year, AYF partnered with eight schools, with 10 students and one adult per school. Kinawa Middle School was the only school selected from Mid-Michigan. The program began with four days of training at the AYF Miniwanca facility and will continue within the individual schools throughout the academic year.

One crucial aspect of the program: The participants may not be students who currently hold leadership positions, but are those who act as positive role models and are eager to make a difference in their community.

The curriculum provided hands-on learning opportunities for students to discover what leadership means, the different leadership styles, all while exploring their own personal strengths and leadership styles.

The individual outcomes for the four days included: Best Self, Balanced Living, Healthy Community Relationships, Personal Effectiveness, Effectiveness in Groups, Openness to Diversity and Social Responsibility. Quite a task for adults let alone sixth-to-eighth graders.

## Civic action plan

Each school team will finish their training by completing a civic action plan. For their project, the Kinawa students will speak to elementary students about recycling efforts and the effect on the environment. They will continue to work as a team for the remainder of the school year, in close collaboration with their school mentor.

The MMSLI is completely funded through private grants, donations and scholarships. Without community support, this program would not be possible.

By investing in our community — and the leaders of tomorrow — we're investing in Michigan's future. Education and leadership are the foundation for getting Michigan back on track. These young leaders will surely foster the growth and development to turn our economy around. They won't let us down.

I urge all members of the business community to offer support wherever they can.

For more information on AYF programs, visit [www.ayf.com](http://www.ayf.com).

*Randy Shanker is the owner of Canada Dry Bottling Co. of Lansing.*

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