



PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

This Illinois Community Takes Character Seriously

The messages are everywhere. On picnic tables, playing fields, light poles, bumper stickers, proclamations. In shops, sports arenas, parks, fire and police departments, schools, churches, businesses, government buildings.

The five villages of the Round Lake Area of Illinois have undergone a character makeover.

Seven years ago, a community coalition called B.E.S.T. (Bringing Everyone's Strength Together) met to discuss issues facing the area. The consensus was that the Round Lake Area was a wonderful place to live but had a number of problems. One was financial woes. Another was a perceived negative image of the area, which is located in one of the wealthiest counties of the state. But the most critical was the school district, which was suffering discipline and attendance problems. Round Lake needed a shot in the arm.

The solution, the coalition decided, was to focus on the villages' positive assets - their character. "We wanted to celebrate and affirm the good works that the schools, community and families were doing and create an ongoing program that would reinforce values," said Kathy Myers, community outreach coordinator for the Round Lake Area School District.



CHARACTER COUNTS! Met Their Needs

After scouring the country for ethics and character-education programs, the coalition chose CC! "We liked that it wasn't a canned program but a framework that could serve our community's needs," Myers said.

Other Round Lake school districts were already using the program, but what sold them was that this effort would involve every aspect of the community. "We felt the common language of the Six Pillars of Character could be easily incorporated into not only schools, but businesses, families and public-service agencies," Myers told the local newspaper after a town meeting. "We're only limited by imagination."

Paula Rohrs, B.E.S.T. co-chairperson, concurred. "This isn't just for students, but for the adults. We're trying to get our business community and their employees involved. If you have employees who are trustworthy and respectful, this will reflect to their customers."



Ethics Training Seminar Boosted Their Resolve

Fast-forward to today. After 25 community leaders, from mayors to principals to police chiefs to CEOs, attended a CC! Ethics in Public Service Training Seminar in 2004, the program picked up speed. The two-day workshop showed the participants how to teach others to teach the components, and their renewed efforts galvanized Round Lake even more:

- Police records, school reports and community perceptions have all improved since the training.
- The village of Round Lake Park passed a resolution supporting an "Ethics in the Workplace Commitment" to embed core ethical values into every aspect of training and communications and all employment, retention and promotion policies. The new policy is now prominently displayed in municipal buildings, posted on the website and distributed to village employees.

- "Last year we had seven nominations for `random acts of kindness` from the program," Myers said. "This year we've had more than 30. It's wonderful to see people acknowledging each other for simple acts that make an impact on others."

Heidi Wodrich, co-director of the Child Development Center in the Round Lake Area Park District, says a new atmosphere permeates the area today. "The program has given us a common language to support and encourage pro-social behavior in our children. Wherever they turn, they see and hear messages about exemplary behavior. Academic skills will take children far, but to be most successful in life, one needs knowledge combined with strongly developed interpersonal skills."