

SCHOOLS

Elective Provides St. Stephen Students With Leadership Skills

NATIONAL PROGRAM INTRODUCED

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It's not necessarily about succeeding. It's about trying to succeed.

That lesson came through loud and clear for St. Stephen Catholic School students who can now count themselves among America's Rising Stars.

Last semester, seven seventh-grade students took part in a first-time elective course at the school on Boyette Road, and said they came away with a greater ability to set and meet goals for themselves.

America's Rising Stars is a 6-year-old youth leadership development program based on a program that's been successfully used in businesses for more than 25 years.

Valrico resident Lisa Huetteman and Brandon resident Mary Owens, both St. Stephen parents who operate a business consulting service called Black Diamond Associates, affiliated with Resource Associates Corp., used St. Stephen as a testing ground for the program they hope to take to other schools and youth programs throughout the county.

This is the first time the 3-year-old school has had a seventh grade and has offered elective classes. America's Rising Stars was among the offerings that also included advanced computers, photography, woodshop, French, board games and student government.

"This elective was a little bit of a challenge for the students," said Huetteman. "It wasn't all fun. We expected them to do homework and to show a commitment. They only got out of it what they put into it."



D'ANN WHITE/Staff photo

Mary Owens, left, and Lisa Huetteman, right, of Black Diamond Associates pose with their first graduating class of America's Rising Stars including Philip Fernandez, Zach Schaefer, Sara Cabeza, Isabelle Gonzalez, Michael Graziano, Ryan Chappell and (absent from the photo) Katie Wagener.

The students were charged with setting a six-week SMARTY goal for themselves. That's an acronym for setting a goal that's "Specific," "Measurable," "Attainable," "Realistically" high using a "Target" date and a plan that's all "Yours."

"At the beginning of the year, we were obligated to choose a goal, set a plan for meeting that goal, say what obstacles we'd face meeting that goal and how we would overcome them, and tell what incentives would help us meet the goal" said student Michael Graziano.

Graziano's goal was to make principal's honor roll.

Using a Power Point presentation he produced himself,

Graziano explained that he planned to accomplish his goal by getting better organized and devoting more hours to studying. Obstacles, he said, included his desire to do extracurricular activities, such as playing soccer.

Although he didn't reach his goal of making straight A's, Graziano said he came away with a better sense of what it takes to succeed.

"I learned that I won't always accomplish my goal the first time but, if you don't try, you'll never make it," he said.

Other students discovered also that meeting goals isn't always easy.

Sara Cabeza wanted to raise \$65 to take her family out for

Christmas dinner. She did various chores to raise the funds but, before she met her goal, she injured her foot and couldn't continue her chores. But she said she was happy she was able to raise \$54.60 and partially fund the family dinner.

Ryan Chappell, on the other hand, not only accomplished his goal but helped his mother, Colleen, accomplish the same goal.

His goal was to train to run the Gasparilla 5K race this month, a total of 3.2 miles.

Prior to that, he'd run only a mile.

"My biggest obstacles were time management and scheduling," said the busy seventh-grader.

Colleen Chappell said her son's enthusiasm was catching. "I ran years ago but I hadn't run four blocks in a year," she said. "But Ryan was so serious and he kept us both on track. There were days I was busy or too tired but he'd get me out there."

Although meeting the goal was important to her son, Colleen Chappell said the biggest benefit of the class was the leadership skills Ryan acquired.

"I think Rising Stars was a wonderful foundation for Ryan, and an awesome opportunity for all the students," she said. "I'm a graduate of Dale Carnegie, and this was like a Dale Carnegie for juniors."

Michael Graziano's mother, Karin, was equally enamored with the program.

"It was so amazing to see the skills these kids were acquiring," said Karin Graziano. "I didn't do this kind of goal planning until I was out in the business world."

Philip Hernandez said he was reluctant to enroll in the class. "My parents talked me into it and I found out I really liked it," he said.

He not only achieved his goal of bowling a 120, but has set a new goal for himself of bowling a 140.

"I've got more confidence and I'm having a lot more fun bowling," he said. "If I didn't take this class, I probably wouldn't be in the bowling league right now."

Huetteman said the program is geared for middle school to junior college students.

Black Diamond is currently seeking sponsorships and grant funding to take the program into other schools and youth programs. Huetteman can be reached at fl.huetteman@verizon.net.