



Township celebrates teens in work programs

Zion-Benton News Staff

With another year in the rear view mirror, the staff at Zion Township held a celebration recently for the 68 out of 74 youth who completed their Summer Work Program. The dinner at Best Western at Market Square was catered by Maravela's Catering. This year was something to especially savor as the team did it with two less staff. Each member of the Township team has a full-time job year round. During the summer, on top of everything else we do day to day, we layer placing around 75 teenagers in employment educational opportunities for six weeks. "That is no small task," stated Cheri Neal, Zion Township Supervisor.

Roy Evans joined the Zion Township team from Waukegan High School where he will be returning, but not before taking advantage of his talent for inspiring and motivating by speaking to the youth. He was direct and clear in his message: stay in school, choose your friends wisely, and anyone can sleep around but it takes character to save yourself. His strongest message was to forgive your parents for what they aren't. Bitterness only hurts the person carrying that burden. The group received his message with appreciation.



Neal shared that in 2003, the entire program was made up of 40 youth, 20 in the morning and 20 in the afternoon, who cut grass for the City of Zion. When they found out that the youth could not legally cut grass, the City Council, which is also the Township Board, expected the program would be discontinued. Zion's Community Service Program was moved to the garage where the youth program operated and Neal was given one evening to find another home for the program.



Al Hill, who was the Zion Park District Director at the time, came to her rescue. "He didn't even flinch when I called, just said, yes, move them all over to the park district garage. We will help with whatever equipment you need to get you through the summer." It was at that point that they started making phone calls to the agencies to find positions for the youth.

The Library and Park District each took kids and placed them in indoor jobs. The following year a strategic partnership was built with Lake County Job Center. They agreed to pay the wages of the kids on the crews. That was how the two different divisions of the Summer Work Program were created. We were thrilled to share that this year over 1,000 youth have graduated since Supervisor Neal was elected in 2001.

In order for the County program to operate well, there needs to be outstanding supervisors for the kids. Zion Township has been blessed to have MacArthur White and Rod Henry for a number of years.

This year, the Township Work Crew did projects for senior homeowners, worked in all the schools in the community, a couple of churches, cleaned the parks, worked at the food pantry and assisted at the farmer's market.

Towards the end of the program, each supervisor has the opportunity to nominate their youth interns for the Employee of the Year award. The youth nominated in the County portion of the program include: Gizelle Barrios, Kendric Byrd, Diamond Rush, Rosalyn Smith, and Devantae Bailey.

The Employee of the Year Award for the County segment of the program went to Devantae Bailey, and here is why, written by Rod Henry: Devantae is the perfect example of why the Summer Work Program exists. He has shown the ability to work well with others and a good work ethic that will carry him a long way in life. It is uncommon for an adolescent to truly grasp the concept of how to be a productive citizen in our society. Devantae understands why the concept is important and he displayed that understanding by the quality and initiative in his work. It has been a pleasure to work with him this summer."

Zion Township could not have this program without the partnerships in the community. The local agencies that placed youth this summer are: CREW Inc., ZB Children's Services Dental Clinic, The Grove at the Lake, Community Action Partnership Day Camp, Zion Park District, NorthPointe Resources, Inc., Zion-Benton Public Library, Zion Police Department, GreenPath Health Group, Inc., Zion-Benton Township High School, Love INC and the Zion Township Assessor's Office.

The Agency Supervisor of the Year Nominations were made by youth. The Supervisors nominated are:

Cathy Alfaro: The Grove at the Lake, Paula Pavelski, Elsie Martinez, JeanKlaeren, Sarah Washkoivak, Debbie Potocek and Debbie Evans: Zion-Benton Public Library, Jennifer Goodwin: CAP-Kids Summer Camp, Beverly Slocum: Zion Police Department, Eric Pasiewicz: Zion Park District. Lisa Woodman: Assessor's Office, Pat Winn: NorthPointe Resources, Inc., and Leandro Sanchez: GreenPath Health Group.

The Supervisor of the Year went to Leandro Sanchez from GreenPath Health Group, LLC. Some of the things that Tianna McDade shared included: "Mr. Sanchez helped me learn more about his job and the skills I need to achieve my own job in the future. He gives good instructions and is encouraging." The following employees were nominated for Employee of the Year: