

# 2006 Honor Roll

Every year, Partnership for Children recognizes several individuals, businesses, and/or organizations which have made significant contributions toward improving conditions for children and youth in Greater Kansas City in the past year. The intent is to acknowledge the outstanding activities in the metropolitan area that are having a positive impact on our children.

*All nominees are judged on the following criteria:*

- Extraordinary activities performed on behalf of children and/or youth (activity should not be part of their usual job)
- Activity benefits children and/or youth in the five-county metro area

## Jim Nunnelly

### Youth radio show serves as a laboratory for workplace and life skills

It's 7:30 on a Saturday morning and the hosts are putting the finishing touches on a radio program at KPRS in Kansas City. The hosts have recorded interviews and lined up musicians, writers and poets as guests.

It could be any network magazine program, except that the hosts and staff are high school students and the show is targeted at their peers.

Generation Rap is a fast paced hour of public affairs, get-ahead-in-life advice and honest talk about tough topics. It's the brainchild of Jackson County COMBAT anti-drug program administrator, Jim Nunnelly, who serves as the unnamed teacher/executive producer to a group of 40 students who put on the show. Nunnelly sees the program as a place where teens can learn it can be fun and cool to be smart and confident.

Director of Community Relations at the Rogers Community Health Center, Nina Howard, listens to the show. She's also been a guest and she says being in the room, watching Nunnelly work with the roomful of young people is something you just have to see for yourself.

"You have to see them excited. You have to watch him mentor them," she says, "It's awesome."

Bishop Miego senior Melisa Johnson, one of the hosts, says Nunnelly has helped her learn how to organize ideas and how to voice her opinion effectively. She and the other teens respect Nunnelly, who they refer to as "Grandad," because "he always has very high energy. He always makes us laugh."

A signature feature of every show is Grandad's "word of the week," a minute of airtime when Nunnelly explains a big word, its meaning and its relevance to youth.

Week after week, the young people on Generation Rap slip these big words in during interviews and on-air patter, proving, indeed, it can be cool to be smart.

# Junior League

## Junior League targets literacy for ten-year focus and makes greater impact through concentrated effort

Seven years into a ten-year campaign, the Junior League of Kansas City, Missouri thinks it made a good decision in 1999. The League decided to focus its charitable efforts in one area – literacy.

President Nancy Fuller says the League surveyed the community and polled volunteers. With the Kansas City School District in trouble and League members attracted to a project that helped children, efforts to increase literacy among children seemed like a natural focus.

Now, Fuller says, League members have many ways to measure the success of their focused efforts, “the one-on-one satisfaction, the relationships with kids, the growth the kids have made.”

To put it more simply, the League’s volunteers get satisfaction from simple acts such as giving a child his or her first book. “ They hold it like you gave them a one thousand dollar bill,” Fuller says.

The Junior League has become an important community partner in numerous literacy programs and projects. It helps the Kansas City Star collect 100,000 books a year in the Hooked on Books drive.

The League helps to staff a Braille library it built at the Children’s Center for the Visually Impaired. Executive Director Mary Lynne Dolemba says the League’s commitment to steady volunteer support “has enabled us to focus on literacy for young children,” something her agency always wanted to do but didn’t have the resources to manage.

Fuller says there is still plenty to do as the League approaches the end of its commitment. She says the organization will regroup and determine whether to keep the literacy focus or choose a new one. She also says the League plans to celebrate the success of Kansas City literacy efforts as it reaches the ten-year mark.

# Score 1 for Health

## For some Kansas City children, health screening is first encounter with health care system

For a surprising number of children in the Kansas City area, the annual “Score 1 for Health Day” may be the first time they have ever encountered a doctor or been checked for blood pressure, dental cavities or excessive weight.

Score 1 is a comprehensive health screening for elementary students in the Kansas City, Raytown and Hickman Mills Schools. Since 1993, Score 1’s mobile screening process has brought teams of 65 medical and allied health students to schools with high percentages of students in reduced lunch programs.

Judi Patrick, nurse coordinator for the Hickman Mills District, says many families don’t get regular medical checkups.

Former Kansas City Chief Deron Cherry began the program and often drops in during the screenings. Cherry believes education is the greatest gift for any child, but education is wasted on children who are not healthy.

“If a kid has a health problem, that kid may lose the thirst for knowledge,” he says.

The program is a partnership between Cherry’s foundation and Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences.

Medical student Heath Wilt, who helped with screenings last year, found Score 1 a valuable opportunity for getting out into the diverse community and obtaining hands-on patient experience.

“It’s the first time we’re able to truly apply our skills on a one-on-one basis,” he says.

Director Annette Campbell says the program is so successful because the University of Medicine and Biosciences students allow Score 1 to conduct a volume of screenings that would not be possible without them, and if parents follow up on problems, the community benefits from increased preventative care.

# SHARE

## *(Students Helping in Areas Related to Education)*

### Shawnee Mission East students volunteer to SHARE in record numbers

Eighteen years ago a handful of students at Shawnee Mission East High School helped school nurse Bev Timons start a community service program. Today, SHARE has grown into the largest not-for-profit student lead organization in the country. Each year now, 75 percent of the school's students sign up for the voluntary not-for-credit program, offering assistance to more than 80 community projects.

SHARE's goals are to start students on lifelong community service; increase self-esteem through accomplishment; help its members learn coping and decision-making skills; and understand the needs of people from diverse communities.

Matt Schulte, one of six student executives who ran last year's program, says some students get involved because SHARE makes volunteering fun. There are also hidden rewards, as he found out himself. Starting high school as a shy freshman, Schulte got involved in SHARE, started volunteering in a food pantry, and a few years later was ready to become a SHARE executive because "I wanted to be a leader and a role model."

SHARE is also a great intergenerational bridge in the community, according to Director of the Village Church Food Pantry, Bob Balla.

SHARE students including Schulte have taken over major responsibilities, shopping with clients, stocking and sorting groceries and staffing the pantry.

The student volunteers are especially helpful because many of the pantry's other volunteers are elderly. SHARE students have made a major commitment to the pantry and have become important to its work.

Shulte has learned a lot about the community through his work at the food pantry. He developed communication and leadership skills he thinks will pay off as he begins New York University this fall. He's also glad to have been exposed to diverse people through his SHARE activities.

# Youth With Vision

## High school students encourage peers, legislators to fight teen alcohol and drug abuse

It's not every day we read headlines about young people who are trying to convince their peers to avoid alcohol and drugs. A group of Kansas City high school students, however, have been so effective in fighting the impact of substance abuse in their communities that they've even explained their program to Katie Couric and the entire country on the Today Show.

Students from seven local counties who belong to Youth with Vision want to serve as positive, drug-free role models for their peers. Member Taylor Mayes, a high school senior, says young people feel pressured to try alcohol and drugs in order to fit in. He knows it's a losing battle, but he's still willing to try.

"I believe if I help one person, it is definitely worthwhile," Mayes says.

Youth with Vision members have a strong and effective legislative agenda. They frequently visit Jefferson City, where they have convinced legislators to pass a keg registration law and have pushed for other changes.

"They learn about drug and alcohol abuse, but they are also learning how to make an effective change," Ryan McElhaney, a youth prevention specialist at Tri-County Mental Health and advisor to the group, says.

Couric featured Youth with Vision's "Wall of Shame and Wall of Fame." The students displayed tee-shirts and other items that make jokes about young people drinking or engaging in risky sexual practices. The Youth with Vision students think these items reinforce a stereotype that all young people are substance abusers. Their corresponding "Wall of Fame" recognized retailers that avoid the stereotype.

Pam Stamper, a parent whose daughter participated in Youth with Vision, says young people who don't abuse substances often feel like outsiders in their schools. Her daughter, Amanda Davis, told her after she joined Youth with Vision while in high school, "I finally fit." Amanda, about to graduate with a degree in social work, plans to make substance abuse counseling a career.



# Honorable Mention

## Barbara Schwartz

**Volunteer makes sure students get hot school lunch, nurtures entire school in the process**

Lunchtime is special at Notre Dame de Sion school in large part because of one person. Barbara Schwartz has made it her 10-year mission to make sure every child gets a hot meal at lunchtime.

Schwartz plans the menus, arranges to get the meals to the school, and recruits parents to help out every day at lunchtime. For Schwartz, it's simple, "happier kids make a happier school."

Principal Catherine Butel says "in addition to feeding the children," Schwartz "nurtures the family circle at Notre Dame de Sion."

In fact, when new parents come to the school, they're advised to volunteer for the school lunch program, because "that's how you meet other parents," Butel says.

Fellow de Sion parent, Corliss Panis, says Schwartz is teaching children to give back to the community and just being around her inspires other parents to volunteer.

"Her involvement is contagious," Panis says.

## Jim Corwin

**Kansas City Police Chief believes early childhood relationships are key to tomorrow's healthy community**

It might surprise some people to see Kansas City Police Chief, Jim Corwin, grilling hot-dogs at a Genesis school picnic, but those who know him say it's typical of both his personal and professional efforts to help young people.

"He's a guy who gets it. He understands the relationship between youth well-being and the health of the community," Jim Caccamo, director of the Metropolitan Council on Early Learning, says.

Before becoming chief, Corwin spent years as a scout leader. Now his youth-related activities include supporting the Children's Place, Genesis, and the Early Learning Leadership Board. The chief believes the research he's read that shows early childhood development is key to a healthy city, so he also pushes the police officers who serve under him to interact with young people through the Police Athletic League, tutoring and summer youth programs.

# Merrell Bennekin

## Georgia transplant sees mentoring as a necessity for young people

For Merrell Bennekin, volunteering to help young people is not some sort of extraordinary activity. Although his parents were both teachers, he made great use of mentors himself during law school and on the way to his current job with the office of community complaints for the Kansas City Board of Police Commissioners.

The Georgia native is a mentor for not one just one organization, but also for the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, the Police Athletic League, and for YouthFriends.

“Everyone needs mentors, especially kids. Kids today have to deal with a lot more than we did. They’re growing up way too fast,” Bennekin says.

April Ragland of YouthFriends calls Bennekin the best kind of volunteer – one who works one-on-one with youth and who they also can rely upon as a board member.

In fact, Ragland says Bennekin may just be a natural born mentor. “He mentors me, to be honest,” she says.

“When young people have positive relationships with people in leadership positions, it benefits the community,” Corwin says.

Alan DuBois, executive director of Genesis, says Corwin’s connection to young people is unusual for any adult, let alone a police chief.

“He will surprise you. The things that come out of his mouth will surprise you,” DuBois says, “because he sees into a child’s heart; he relates to them as human beings.”