

# *The Fourth and Fifth Rs*

## Respect and Responsibility

Volume 5, Issue 1

Winter, 1999

### *Canandaigua's Community-Wide Character Initiative*

Ellen Polimeni, Mayor and House Principal

**T**he character of our youth. The character of our community. Can we address these two elements so essential to quality of life in any community? As mayor of the city of Canandaigua, New York, and a middle school house principal in the city school district, I believe the answer is a resounding "Yes."

In 1997, the Canandaigua City School District formed a committee to look at the issue of character education. Our goals were: to fully engage parents, area clergy, and youth leaders as partners in the character initiative; to provide a regular communication link to all parents and partners in this initiative; to celebrate activities which promote character education throughout the year; and to promote school and community recognition of exemplary character.

**W**e began by formulating a partnership agreement. In signing on, community groups agreed to help develop five character traits: *respect, responsibility, caring, honesty, and healthful lifestyles*. The agreement read, in part: "*As partners in the development of the character of our youth, we promise to promote these character traits in our interactions with others and accept the responsibility of modeling behavior which reflects these traits.*"

More than 36 partners have signed the agreement, including the Ontario County Sheriff's Department; Big Brother, Big Sister Program; Canandaigua Chamber of Commerce; the Salvation Army; the Canandaigua Area Soccer League; and the Canandaigua Rotary Club.

#### *What We've Done So Far*

◆ All of our schools are implementing character education. The team we send each year to SUNY Cortland's Summer Institute in Character Education includes community representatives.

◆ The Canandaigua YMCA has opened a Youth Center, which offers many activities at no cost.

◆ City police have initiated an after-school program between 2:30 and 6:00 p.m. in the Salvation Army building. During that time there had been a high incidence of shoplifting and criminal mischief. Police Chief Patrick McCarthy said that since the program began providing tutoring, field trips, and other activities, the problems have decreased significantly.

◆ A community policing program has been implemented in a low-income area where 40 percent of the juvenile crimes had been occurring. The same police officer is now assigned to patrol the neighborhood, become familiar with residents, learn their problems, and work on constructive solutions.

◆ The City Council enacted a *Family Responsibility Act* in June 1998, authorizing police to take into custody youths under age 16 (generally immune from criminal prosecution). The new local law put the burden on parents to be responsible for the actions of their children. An initial warning is given, but subsequent problems result in fines for the parents.

**S**ince launching our community-wide character initiative, we have seen a substantial drop in school suspensions and juvenile crime. ■

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*This newsletter is supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.*

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# *Character Ed. at Hartford Union High: Becoming a "1<sup>st</sup>-Class School"*

**Donna L. Moll, Director of Curriculum**

**W**hen the Hartford Union High School Board of Education designated character education as a goal, we formed a task force of staff, clergy, and parents to pursue that objective. Prior to our first meeting, all 30 members were given *Educating for Character* to read so that we all had a solid base from which to start.

We agreed at the outset that we did not want to implement a specific character education curriculum. Rather, the committee wanted character education to be a way of life at Hartford Union High School.

After surveying our parents and community, we decided to focus on the character traits of *honesty, respect, responsibility, and integrity*. Our task force spent a year and a half looking into what was already working well and visiting other schools before we arrived at the concept of being a *1<sup>st</sup> Class School*. (See box, page 3.)

**A**lthough we're not yet where we want to be, we believe we've made a good start. Here are seven things that are working well for us:

## *A Visual Moral Culture*

Using the four character traits and the 1<sup>st</sup>-Class concept, the committee, with help from the art department, developed a logo and affirmation statements. The logo and affirmations were made into posters and are displayed in every classroom.

A local artist created a large 1<sup>st</sup>-Class sign with the affirmations for the entryway of our building. It is now the first thing you see when you enter the high school. The logo and affirmations are also included in our parent/student handbook, teacher handbook, and student assignment notebooks.

You can even see the 1<sup>st</sup>-Class School posters in school busses and in Sunday schools. It's our vision that someday our whole city of Hartford will adopt the goal of becoming a 1<sup>st</sup>-Class Community.

## *Ongoing Leadership*

The Board of Education has designated our 1<sup>st</sup>-Class

Committee (originally the task force) as an ongoing district committee. An important change was the addition of students in order to get their perspectives. The committee meets regularly throughout the school year to make sure 1<sup>st</sup> Class stays in the forefront of everything we do.

## *Sustained Attention to Character*

Homeroom time, which is typically 16 minutes, has been used to discuss the 1<sup>st</sup>-Class behavior expected of students and relevant sections of the student handbook. During an extended fifth period class, students prepared posters promoting the four affirmations, and the best posters were displayed throughout the school. This is now going to be done annually with our incoming freshmen students.

Students are reminded that keeping the hallways clear of trash is expected behavior, and that failing to do so would result in loss of the privilege of having vending machines available for their use. If a teacher or administrator hears a student casually using foul language, the staff member will walk along with the student and remind him or her that such language is not appropriate. Staff, in most instances, receive a thank you for such a reminder.

**C**haracter education has become ingrained in the everyday activities of the school. The student newspaper often includes articles that reference the 1<sup>st</sup>-Class initiative. During classroom instruction, teachers try to make a connection with character. In a student laboratory, for example, a teacher will discuss cleaning up at the end of the period in terms of 1<sup>st</sup>-Class behavior.

## *Staff Development For All*

All staff, including secretaries, custodians, student supervisors, bus drivers, teachers, and administration, have had staff development on the 1<sup>st</sup>-Class initiative. We ask, "When students don't act in a 1<sup>st</sup>-Class manner, how can we approach them respectfully?" Role-playing common school situations has helped us get this message across. We could see that a great many situations



that might become confrontational can be avoided when we treat each other with respect.

We also provide staff development for new staff so they are brought on board. All staff have been asked to set an example for students. Though a few faculty continue to make fun of the program, most are very supportive.

### *Recognizing 1st-Class Behavior*

The Board of Education now has a regular agenda item to recognize students or staff who have done something that is “1<sup>st</sup> Class.”

The board and superintendent sign a card that has the 1<sup>st</sup>Class logo on one side and on the other a description of the 1<sup>st</sup>Class action of the recipient. The card is presented during a board meeting, which is televised on a public access station. Among those honored have been the gymnastics team for helping opposing teams pick up equipment after competitions on the road, students who turned in found money, exemplary volunteers, and staff who worked on their own time during freshmen orientation.

### *Parent Outreach*

Parents are kept informed of the 1<sup>st</sup> Class initiative through our *Parent Involve* monthly newsletter. The newsletter reminds parents that they set an example by their own behavior. For example, parents have been asked not to direct foul language at, or otherwise mistreat, opposing teams at sporting events. That problem has since decreased.

### *Motivational Assembly Speakers*

To kick-off the 1<sup>st</sup> Class initiative for our students, we brought in motivational speaker Mark Sharenbroich

for a student assembly. He beautifully wove into his presentation our 1<sup>st</sup> Class affirmations.

We now bring in motivational speakers for our seniors each year and ask them to use the 1<sup>st</sup> Class affirmations in their presentations. The seniors are our leaders, and we want them to carry on the 1<sup>st</sup> Class tradition. Freshmen students are introduced to the 1<sup>st</sup> Class concept through homeroom discussions. Not all of the students have bought into the program, but we’re making steady progress.

Senior Katie Feutz said that when the program was introduced to student leaders, she joined the effort because of her involvement in student council and a student marketing club. Feutz said that initially there was some student opposition, which was best illustrated by a group who took to wearing T-shirts mocking the program. But, she added, consistent efforts by teachers and student leaders gradually overcame negative sentiments, to the point where about 95 percent of the students support the 1<sup>st</sup>Class affirmations.

Students now take it upon themselves to demonstrate 1st Class behavior, Feutz said. That includes members of the school's public speaking team giving a standing ovation for the first-place

finishes by other teams at a competition. Feutz said there has also been a marked decrease in swearing in school. ■

*A 1<sup>st</sup> Class folder with information about Hartford's initiative is available from: Donna L. Moll, Hartford Union High School, 805 Cedar Street, Hartford, Wisconsin 53027; Tel. (414) 673-8950; Fax: (414) 673-8943; E-mail: donna.moll@huhs.org.*

***HONESTY &  
RESPECT &  
RESPONSIBILITY =  
INTEGRITY***

***We are honest and tell the truth.  
We accept the responsibility to  
respect ourselves, others,  
property, and the environment.  
We are reliable and accountable  
and bring pride to our families,  
school and community.  
We work to be our personal best  
because we are . . .***

***1st CLASS***

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# *Improving Bus Behavior by Teaching Kids to Be "Bus Buddies"*

**Dr. Greg K. Gibbs, Principal**

**L**ike many elementary schools, we have had an ongoing problem with bus discipline. We have approximately 700 K-4 students, all of whom ride the bus to and from school. We do not have school bus aides or other supervision during this time.

To improve bus behavior, we started a program called "*Bus Buddies*." By "buddies" we don't mean pairing kids with a partner but rather encouraging them to "be a buddy" to everyone else by taking positive action when someone is the victim of negative behavior. The idea came from our shared decision making team and was seen as part of our larger, district-wide character education effort to instill responsibility, commitment to excellence, and student ownership.

**O**ur bus behavior program is taught by a 3-person team: our school social worker, a parent, and one of our gifted programming teachers who teaches thinking skills. This team works with one busload of students at a time to train students in how to handle conflicts.

The program emphasizes the importance of all students helping to avoid and halt conflicts on school busses. We teach students that everyone has a role in dealing with the issue. We tell them that even if you are not the victim, you have an obligation to tell the bully to stop or at least inform the bus driver of the problem.

## *How the Training Works*

On the morning that a given group (about 50 students) is to receive the instruction, they come right from the bus into our auditorium area for a 45-minute session before being released to their homerooms.

The staff team role-plays typical bus situations, such as a student calling someone names, one student pushing

or shoving another, or a student taking someone's backpack. Students are asked, "What would be the best possible way to respond to this situation?" They usually come up with very appropriate behaviors, but when there is any doubt, the adults redirect the suggestions so that solutions are focused in a positive, quality manner. Emergency situations are also touched upon, delineating which adults have responsibility during any crisis.

We have 14 busses. This training program for individual busloads of students goes on every day for about three weeks. We then do a follow-up session for those who were absent, walked that day, or were driven by their parents. A second round of sessions is held about six months later for a review.

## *Bus Driver Referrals Are Down*

By surveying students, we found that our program has made a difference in bus behavior. It has encouraged students to stop bad bus behavior and avoid becoming victimized by others. There has also been a decrease in the number of bus drivers' write-ups of problem behavior. Our students say they now feel more confident about how to handle problems on the bus.

The lessons learned from the Bus Buddy program appear to have carried over to other parts of the school day. It's common to hear students using the same techniques of dealing with conflicts in the cafeteria and the hallways.

**W**e are pleased with our results so far and may expand the program as needed. We are planning annual refreshers at the start of school and will do follow-ups later in the year to ensure that the learnings don't fade from memory and practice. ■

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# PREVIEW

## Family Movie & TV Review™

Kevin Conlon, Assistant Editor, *Fourth and Fifth Rs*

For parents and teachers who feel they're fighting an uphill battle against shoddy values in the media, John Evans is a friend indeed. For the past 18 years, he's been trying to provide families with the moral low-down on current films so they can give meaningful guidance to their kids.

Evans is editor-in-chief of *Preview Family Movie & TV Review*, a semi-monthly publication which reviews movies and TV shows (a recent addition). For movies, *Preview* gives a review, an acceptability rating, and a "moral box score" that reports on violence, bad language, sexual intercourse, nudity, sexually suggestive dialogue, drug use, and other objectionable content.

The Richardson, Texas-based publication has about 5,000 subscribers. *Preview* also produces the book, *Family Video Guide*, which has been reprinted and updated every two years for the past 10 years. The guide contains over 1,000 videos recommended for family viewing. Two years ago Evans also began *PreviewOnline* ([www.previewonline.org](http://www.previewonline.org)), with free mini-reviews.

"We're definitely family-oriented," Evans said. "We're trying to help mothers and fathers make informed decisions. We give specifics, which parents want and need. We have been criticized by some as being too strict. But our concern is to bring people back to a high standard in their viewing of television and movies." ■

*PREVIEW Family Movie & TV Review is published twice monthly (\$34/year). FAMILY VIDEO GUIDE (148 p. book) is \$8. Contact PREVIEW, 1309 Seminole, Richardson, TX 75080; Tel. (800) 807-8071; Fax (972) 669-9040.*

### CURRENT RECOMMENDED MOVIES

A Bug's Life	G
Air Bud 2: Golden Receiver	PG
Antz	PG
Ever After	PG-13
Hands on a Hard Body	PG
I'll be Home for Christmas	PG
Life is Beautiful	PG-13
Prince of Egypt	PG

### Sample Review: *The Waterboy* (PG-13)

Entertainment +2 ½ (+4 = excellent)  
Acceptability -1 (-4 = severely objectionable)

Adam Sandler plays a socially backward and sheltered 31-year-old Louisiana boy, Bobby Boucher, who is raised by an overprotective "mama" (Kathy Bates). With his lack of social skills, less-than-average looks and intellect, as well as a stuttering problem, Bobby has been the brunt of cruel jokes and teasing by the football team where he has served as waterboy since childhood.

He is fired from that job but gets another when Coach Klein (Henry Winkler) hires him to be waterboy for his failing community college football team. In a twist of fate, Coach Klein discovers Bobby's defensive potential when he tackles one of the players for making fun of him. Against his mama's wishes, Bobby becomes a college student and joins the football team. His lifelong pent-up aggression is released as tremendous tackling power, leading the team to its first winning streak in its history. Sandler's mix of slapstick and "idiot" humor in this film can provide some good laughs, but don't be surprised if you find yourself wondering whether to feel sorry for the naïve Bobby Boucher or laugh at him.

While "The Waterboy" can certainly induce laughter, it relies on crude and potentially offensive elements for much of its comedic material. A socially backward stut-terer who has not yet become a "man" because of his virginity is just an example of what the viewer is expected to find amusing.

### SUMMARY: *The Waterboy*

**Crude Language:** Many times (mild 1, moderate 14).

**Obscene language:** Several (7) times (s-word).

**Profanity:** None.

**Violence:** Few; moderate, mostly slapstick (football tackling, man hit in head, general roughhousing between guys, knife held to man's throat).

**Sexual Intercourse:** None

**Sexual Suggestive Dialogue/Action:** Innuendoes about bisexual activity and multiple sex partners; man grabs woman's clothed breasts; references to breasts, virginity, and intercourse.

**Other:** Could encourage harrassment of socially challenged people.

# ***30 Ways Mayors and Local Government Can Promote Good Character***

Tom Lickona, Director, Center for the 4th and 5th Rs

- 1** Join an organization that promotes character, e.g., *Character Counts Coalition* (310/306-1868) or *Character Education Partnership* (800/988-8081).
- 2** Issue a Mayor's/City Council Proclamation endorsing the target character traits and encouraging all employees and citizens to model and promote these traits.
- 3** Take part in CHARACTER COUNTS WEEK (3rd week of October); encourage schools, families, and community groups to do activities that promote character.
- 4** Create a leadership group from all parts of the community; provide character education training with a commitment from a nucleus to serve as trainers.
- 5** Sponsor a Community Summit on Character Education; invite gov't. leaders, business people, youth group leaders, clergy, parents, educators, and youth. Focus: *What character traits does the community want its youth and adults to possess? How can the schools, families, and community foster these traits?*
- 6** Assess community needs and character resources.
- 7** Establish different committees (e.g., on schools, families, youth organizations, sports, the media) to deal with different aspects of the character challenge.
- 8** Ask major employers and service clubs to help fund the effort; ask printers to donate printing of storefront posters, flyers, school cafeteria placemats, etc.
- 9** Ask the Chamber of Commerce to promote the traits.
- 10** Ask youth organizations such as Scouts, 4-H, camps, sports leagues, and after-school care programs to incorporate the target traits into their activities.
- 11** Train adult mentors to promote the character traits.
- 12** Ask all schools, K-12, to infuse the character traits into their daily curricular and extracurricular activities.
- 13** Help community groups exchange character ideas; collect successful strategies in a *Book of Character*.
- 14** Arrange for local media coverage of how schools and community groups are promoting character.
- 15** Ask the local newspaper to run a series of articles, each focused on a particular trait and spotlighting exemplary students or other community members.
- 16** Have the Police Department sponsor a "Do the Right Thing" program honoring young people for acts of good character.
- 17** Have City Council present certificates to youth and other groups that perform public service; give a special monthly award to a Person of Character.
- 18** Challenge all public employees, including candidates for office, to model the target traits.
- 19** Display the target traits, a character logo, and pertinent quotes wherever possible: in the Mayor's office, City Hall lobby and Council Room; on city busses, trucks, pavilions, parade floats, fair exhibits, and school marquees.
- 20** Have all computers in city/county offices display the monthly trait and a quote when employees log on.
- 21** Ask businesses to display the monthly trait in their storefronts and in the workplace environment.
- 22** Use the traits as employee performance expectations; ask employers to incorporate the traits into interviews.
- 23** As mayor, visit schools to support character efforts.
- 24** Invite a state or U.S. senator or representative to speak at a community event on the importance of good character; get a prominent sports figure to endorse your effort. Invite school and community groups to City Hall to describe their character education efforts; use the Community Access Channel to televise these reports.
- 25** Create a Teen Council to advise the Mayor and City Council on youth matters. Work with youth to create a teen center.
- 26** Work with schools and community agencies to expand students' opportunities for service-learning.
- 27** To discourage gang membership, seek to involve all middle school students in an after-school club or sport. Teach existing gangs how to resolve conflicts.
- 28** Ask faith communities to incorporate the traits into sermons and religious instruction.
- 29** Sponsor a Random Acts of Kindness Week or Month.
- 30** Create a community Family Resource Center that provides parent education and family counseling; encourage parents to read their children books that build character; provide list of recommended books.

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