

ON THE MOVE

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coming next week:
Hispanic youth rally



Jernard McMath, 6, (center) and Joshua Murray, 10, (right) play checkers at Holy Rosary's Drop-In Night while Jernard's brother Tavarus, 11, (left) and teen supervisor Tony Ocon look on and give strategy advice, May 4.

“I love being with kids”

Lionel Summersett and Clyde Felton have outgrown Holy Rosary Church's Drop-In Center for kids. But the two cousins keep coming anyway.

Lionel, 17, and Clyde, 16, serve as volunteer chaperons for these Friday-night recreational outings. They, along with other teen volunteers, oversee children in grades four-eight. In Lionel's opinion, this duty is beneficial for both him and the younger folks.

"I have a lot of spare time and if I don't use my time right, I'm going to get in trouble," said Lionel. "Plus, I love being with kids."

That love was evident at a Drop-In Night on May 4. While a large group clamored around him, anxious to be the first to play foosball or air hockey, a smiling Lionel calmly asked each person to choose a number. Those closest to guessing the number he had selected got first crack at the sign-up sheet.

Meanwhile, Jay Best chatted with a young boy. "So Josh, how does it feel to be the new checkers champ? Good?" he inquired.

"Yup," said 10-year-old Josh Murray, jumping up and down and clutching his new pocket calculator prize.

Best, 23, a parishioner at Sacred Heart Cathedral, has volunteered for four years at the Drop-In Nights. He said he wants to be a positive influence with this age group for a simple reason: "Well, they're our future," he remarked.

The future can seem cloudy at times for these kids, most of whom live in the immediate neighborhood surrounding Holy Rosary. The church is located in a section of northwest Rochester that's often beset with violence and other criminal activity.

A few years back, some area parishes, both Catholic and Protestant, brainstormed ways to provide healthy activities for neighborhood youth. The result was a coalition known as the Northwest Ecumenical Youth Partnership.

From there, the Drop-In Center was established in 1995 at Holy Rosary's gym. Drop-in nights are held two Friday evenings per month during the school year. They are funded, in part, by the Diocese of Rochester and individual donors.

Drop-In Center participants are treated to free pizza and soda; art and crafts;



Volunteer Jay Best reminds the children to follow the rules during a break in a dodgeball game.

board games; and basketball and dodgeball. Some nights include live entertainment such as Moonbeam 2 Earth, a musical group from School 34 that sang on May 4.

About 50 young people attended the May 4 Drop-In Night. That number has been known to rise past 60, said Judy Borrelli, Holy Rosary's religious-education administrator, who coordinates the events. Because of these large numbers, she said, she schedules numerous supervisors, some coming from the parish's social-ministry committee.

Approximately seven youth and young-adult volunteers play a key role as well, Borrelli added. For the most part, they enjoy friendly interaction with the kids. But there are times they're required to keep the peace — which, according to Tony Ocon, is no easy task when he's faced with a roomful of revved-up youngsters.

"There's a lot of competitive spirit and sometimes they want to take that into overtime," said Tony, 17, a parishioner at Holy Rosary.

Tony acknowledged that setting a good example for the kids means curbing your own temper: "You want to yell, but you've got to keep yourself in check so you can keep them in check."

Clyde has a simple formula that has helped settle disputes every time, he said.

"I just get them together and ask them what the problem is. Then I have them shake hands, and go back out and play," Clyde said.

Tony said the center and its volunteers help keep kids on the right path, remarking, "They need good role models."

Best said he strives to teach kids to respect one another without using foul language. He noted that the kids seem to respond positively to this guidance.

"You get 2-1/2 hours every two weeks to teach them values, and sometimes it's enough," Best commented.

Tony said he's seen evidence of this when he walks home from Aquinas Institute, where he attends high school.

"I see at least 10 kids (from Drop-In Night) saying 'hi' to me sometimes," he said.

Lionel, who lives with Clyde across the street from Holy Rosary, said he didn't grow up with a strong mentor but would like to be that kind of person for Drop-In Night youth.

"I want them to have something I didn't have," he stated.