

Mayor's Column for the September 5, 2012 Review

A jolting, upsetting experience while serving as your mayor occurred when I received a call from Police Chief McElroy a few years ago to let me know that an Evansville youngster was dead because of substance abuse. I have also cried with Evansville families, friends, and neighbors following the sad choices of Evansville children to end their lives. Alcohol-related car accidents involving our youth have permanently impacted Evansville families.

In 2009 BASE (Building A Safer Evansville) was formed as positive action to enhance our commitment to the well-being of local youth. With the assistance of Partners in Prevention Rock County, last year BASE volunteers committed to the significant effort of applying for a federal Drug Free Community grant that would provide valuable resources for addressing serious risky behaviors occurring in our youth. Volunteers worked hundreds of hours developing the framework for a community plan to address substance abuse, with programs that include mentoring opportunities, fostering intergenerational relationships, improving and supporting parenting skills, offering youth leadership training, and providing family-friendly activities that celebrate wholesome fun. A true community collaboration involving city officials and public safety staff, school district representatives, Evansville Youth Center, 4-H, Evansville Community Partnership, churches, health care professionals, parents, and business community, drafted a quality, detailed application that resulted in a successful submission.

We were notified on August 27th that BASE was awarded a five-year grant totaling \$625,000. We will receive \$125,000 per year to organize and facilitate local youth drug and substance abuse prevention. Evansville is one of 60 new communities nationally to receive funding this year. (There is a renewal process at the end of 5 years to receive an additional 5 years of funding.)

A significant community commitment in submitting the grant application was a dollar for dollar local match of grant funds. Donations and in-kind contributions of materials and volunteer hours will be carefully tracked to successfully accomplish \$125,000 of Evansville match each year. Examples of in-kind services include donated office space and equipment use. BASE Board member meetings and event planning time by volunteers are examples of eligible match services. Donated publicity/advertising and activity/meeting space will be included in our local match. Evansville Community Partnership will serve as the fiscal agent during grant administration.

There is much work to do. The 2012 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was completed by Evansville High School 10th and 12th grade students. 48% of these students reported they had had at least one drink in the past 30 days, 10% higher than Rock County respondents, and about 6% higher than Wisconsin and national figures. 28% of EHS students taking the survey reported binge drinking, imbibing 5 or more drinks in a row, in the past 30 days, also higher than County, State, and national averages.

2012 YRBS highlighted serious statistics on depression. 24.6% of high school students completing the survey reported feeling so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that they stopped doing usual activities. 13.8% of the students reported having seriously considered attempting suicide at least once in the last year. 6.7% reported having attempted suicide at least once in the last year.

BASE members and organizations use their individual talents and strengths to contribute to the long-term goal of reducing substance abuse in our children. As mayor, I have supported BASE by attending board meetings when I am available. I attended BASE Family and Community Town Suppers. I interact with our students, welcoming third grade students to City Hall, participating in the spring High School Reality Check and the Project Citizen presentations, meeting with local Scouts, volunteering at Youth Center activities, etc. I have occasionally written about BASE efforts, including the drug drop-off box, a collaboration of BASE, the Evansville Police Department, and the Rock County Health Department. This month I will attend a seminar, sponsored by The Southern Alliance for Wisconsin Youth, entitled "Identifying Community Strengths: A Discussion with John McKnight." McKnight is a well-known researcher on community development at Northwestern University.

There are many examples of the strengths of local organizations and individuals that benefit our children. The Woodchucks have mentored middle-school students while teaching them woodworking basics. 4-H and Scout programs foster independence and develop leadership skills. Citizen volunteers work with our youth at the schools, supporting local learning while modeling community care and concern.

The Evansville Youth Center provides a safe, encouraging environment for middle school students. The DFC grant will provide opportunities to develop additional programs to strengthen youth self-esteem.

New events to celebrate healthy families will be undertaken. As part of action planning, discussions of a local National Night Out party and summer "block" parties to strengthen neighborhoods have occurred.

You will be hearing much more about BASE initiatives as implementation of planned programs and activities gets underway. Organizational collaborations will magnify the results of current community programs and new BASE efforts.

Interested citizens are encouraged to attend regular BASE meetings that are held the third Friday morning of each month at 8:30 a.m. at Creekside Place. Learn how you can use your skills and talents to support healthy behaviors in our youth while reducing their risky, damaging actions that can have permanent repercussions.

Community Announcements

This is the first week of the new school year. Please watch for children riding bikes and walking to school. Be especially vigilant driving in the vicinity of schools and near crosswalks. Follow posted speed limits.

The State Commissioner of Railroads will hold a public hearing on the condition of the track crossing on East Main Street near the bridge. It will be held on Thursday, September 6, at 10:00 a.m. at City Hall. The City will document current physical condition with photos and measurements. Residents and businesses are encouraged to comment on the crossing at the public hearing.

Community Congratulations/Thanks

Our community thanks Partners in Prevention Rock County, Jennifer Braun, Mentor Project Coordinator, and BASE volunteers. Their hours of effort and commitment resulted in successfully securing funding for community programs to bolster healthy choices and reduce risky behavior in our youth.