

BEING A MAN, NOT THE MAN



Joseph Horan, Levy Building Men Program Director, chats with eighth-graders Quamell Mobley and Derrick Gore outside their school.

Maturing in a tough neighborhood of Syracuse, Joe Horan spent his teenage years playing basketball and succumbing to local peer pressure. “I didn’t know what it was to be a man when I was that age,” said Joe. “I learned it later on, after going through a lot of bad experiences.”

Joe, now a middle school physical education teacher, began leading the Building Men program at Levy Middle School three years ago. The after-school program, which serves seventh and eighth grade students, promotes the concept of true manhood through academic success, compassion and positive relationships.

Building Men rewards good classroom behavior, attendance and grades with the opportunity to play intramural basketball. The boys are only allowed to play if periodic progress reports are signed by their teachers.

“Some of these kids, for the first time in their lives, come out of this program believing it is okay to be good, maybe even cool,” said Joe.

The merits and successes of Building Men attracted the attention of two separate grantmaking groups at the Community Foundation this year. **The Future Fund of CNY**, a giving circle of emerging philanthropists, focused its grantmaking on youth development and its members chose to award the program a \$5,000 grant. The grant was used for the purchase of books for the special Building Men section of the school library and for new basketball uniforms.

A few months later, the Community Foundation’s **Youth in Philanthropy (YIP)** program awarded a \$6,000 grant. The youth in YIP, a group of local teenagers who learned about the grantmaking process through a series of workshops, thought the program was most deserving

“A REAL MAN TAKES CARE OF HIS RESPONSIBILITIES.

HE HELPS OTHER PEOPLE AND DOESN’T FOCUS ON HIMSELF ALL OF THE TIME.”

—Derrick Gore, Building Men Graduate, age 14

In addition to its emphasis on education, the program also provides the boys positive role models and mentors. Honest discussions are held about the gangs, violence and drugs they face every day.

“I’ve learned that a man is a part of the community. He takes care of his family and is a friend, a true friend,” said 14-year old Building Men graduate Quamell Mobley.

Special events such as community service projects, field trips and lock-ins provide the early-teens with a sense of belonging that serves as an alternative to gangs and negative peer pressure.

because it stressed the need to do well in school and be a responsible person. Joe plans to utilize the YIP grant to expand the program to Nottingham, where most of his graduates go on to attend high school.

At the end of the school year, Joe took some of the boys to SUNY Morrisville for a tour. He observed that they came away from the trip with an “I can do this” attitude about the future.

“I don’t think I have all the answers, but I think I have found something that helps some kids,” said Joe. “Until now, most of these boys have thought their options were limited. Now they know it doesn’t have to be that way.”