

Volunteers

Volunteer Profile Ken Skrable, Antrim

Where billiards and life collide

At Antrim's Avenue A Teen Center, one volunteer uses the game of pool to teach bigger lessons

By ANNIE CARD

For the Monadnock Ledger-Transcript

At 4 p.m. last Wednesday, the Avenue A Teen Center in Antrim was quiet. Two girls were doing homework at a small table while another sat across the room working on a computer.

Fifteen minutes later, "Footloose" blasted from the stereo speakers sending the girls into a spontaneous dance fit. The 1980s hit ended, but the high-decibel barrage continued even with the girls back at their table, hunched over textbooks and writing feverishly in their notebooks.

At 4:20, a big man in jeans and a fleece vest entered the dance/study hall saying a quick hello to everyone.

Ken Skrable, a 14-year resident of Antrim, volunteers at the center two days a week. "I'm the billiards guy," is how he sums up his role at the Avenue A, which opened in 2007 and today is considered a home-away-from-home for up to a dozen teens.

Avenue A, housed in one of the old mills on Main Street, is a Grapevine program. Teens raise about 10 percent of the budget, and remainder is garnered through grants, donations, town support and fundraisers. And volunteers like Skrable are a big part of the success.

"Pool is fun for me because it's a great way to teach. Geometry, it's all about angles, and so is shooting pool. Geometry is the easy part. The kids catch on to that pretty fast. But physics, that's a little harder, because they usually just want to hit the balls as hard as they can."

"I break it down for them, describing the laws of motion with a pool shot. You hit the cue ball only as hard as you have to. I teach them to think 3-dimensionally. If the cue ball hits one ball, that ball hits those two, where do all the balls end up?"

As much as Skrable loves the game of pool and the mathematical beauty of the perfect shot, the thing he loves most is teaching the teens to "focus on the joy of the moment when you make that one good shot. A lot of the kids beat themselves up for not doing well at one thing or another. The focus is all negative. I teach them to celebrate the things they do well, be happy about that one great shot, instead of focusing on whether you win or lose."

Besides shooting pool, Skrable hangs out and talks to the kids, fills in on percussion when the band starts playing and helps out with fundraisers like the occasional spaghetti suppers Avenue A hosts at the nearby Presbyterian Church.

He hasn't always been this active. It was volunteering that helped him get back on his feet, literally.

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— Ken Skrable, Avenue A Teen Center volunteer

Five years ago, Skrable suffered a debilitating back injury. Two years after the injury, he said his insurance finally agreed to the surgery doctors insisted he needed. "I had three surgeries in less than a year. I was in so much pain that I was medicated with morphine, Valium and methadone. It's the only way we could even touch the pain. It was so bad I couldn't eat, and lost lots of weight, over 100 pounds."

"I couldn't work. The pain was horrible. Even when my doctor helped me get off all the medication that made me so sick, I was depressed and couldn't see things ever getting better. I did a lot of writing and that helped me get away from my pain. And I meditate every day, but that just helps me live with the pain. It's always there. I realized that I was going to hurt whether I sat at home or went out and did things."

Skrable joined the Peoples Exchange Service four years ago. He drove people to doctor's appointments and took them shopping. He also did a little landscape design.

In return Skrable got his front door replaced and a woodstove moved and hooked up. But he says the most important thing he got was contact with people and finding something he could do. "It was through PES that I heard about Avenue A. I've been here for about a year. It makes me feel good to help a kid figure out a pool shot and to be part of a place that kids want to come hang out with their friends and feel good about themselves."

Skrable recently started working part-time for Monadnock Developmental Services, helping a man with basic life skills. "There's no sense sitting at home miserable, when you can be out helping others and helping yourself," Skrable said.

Antrim teens who haven't checked out Avenue A are encouraged to stop by, help out with Avenue A's Facebook page, get in on the skateboard project, play some music or learn to shoot pool with the Billiard Guy. Call for hours: 588-3334 or email: teencenter@tds.net.



PHOTO BY ANNIE CARD
Ken Skrable watches as Stefanie Murray, 15, a freshman at ConVal, puts one in the side pocket at Avenue A Teen Center on Main Street in Antrim.

Help Out

WHAT'S NEEDED

Monadnock Area Transitional Shelter (MATS)
Dining room or kitchen table and chairs, computer desk and chair, washer and dryer (preferably energy efficient), blender, reliable car, twin-sized blankets. Call 924-5033.

Big Brothers Big Sisters
Plastic beads, games (Candy Land, Scrabble, Monopoly), markers, pencils, pens, stamping supplies (ink pads and stamps). Call Rachel at 352-9536.

The Family Center of Greater Peterborough
Two picnic tables: one child-sized and one for adults. Call Liz at 924-6306.

Harrisville Children's Center
Two filing cabinets: 2-drawer lateral or 4-drawer tower. Call Linda at 827-3905.

MAPS Counseling Services
Laptop or desk top PCS with Windows XP that are less than 5 years old. Also, small bookcases. Call 355-2244, ext. 101.

— Listings courtesy of Monadnock United Way. Visit them at www.muw.org.

WAYS TO HELP

1 Monadnock United Way is organizing community debris cleanup over three Saturdays in May. Volunteers are sought to assist residents their ice-storm damaged yards, which are defined as the immediate areas around their house. The number of available volunteer teams will help determine how many home sites can be cleaned up. For more information, call 352-2088.

2 The Scott-Farrar Home, an assisted living facility in Peterborough, needs volunteers to help with gardening, reading and crafts, and for entertainment such as card games and boardgames. 924-3691.

3 FixIt Program needs volunteers to do minor repairs for elderly persons, and elderly persons needing assistance. 1-800-322-1073, ext. 6168.

4 Kitty Rescue and Adoption in Jaffrey is looking for volunteers to help care for the more than 100 cats in residence. Volunteers have the flexibility to set their own hours and days, and this can be as little as one hour one day per week to as much as they are willing. A volunteer's primary job is caring for the cats living environment. This means cleaning litter boxes, changing soiled bedding, and ensuring fresh food and water daily. Volunteers may also help with general shelter upkeep such as light cleaning, dish washing, and litter and trash disposal. If interested, call 532-9444.

— More listings on Page 16

HOW TO SUBMIT

Send us an e-mail with your organization's needs and upcoming volunteer opportunities at volunteers@ledgertranscript.com

LOOKING TO HELP?

If you want to volunteer, but are unsure where you fit in, you can call the Monadnock Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) and the Monadnock Volunteer Center at 924-7350.

Hard at Work

Photos of volunteer work in the Monadnock region



KATHLEEN CRAWFORD

Volunteer Betty Avery plays with children as part of the Better Beginnings program at the Grapevine in Antrim. Parents meet with parenting educators while their children play in a program staffed by volunteers.



COURTESY PHOTOS

From left, volunteer Emma Murphy, athlete Emily Manfre, volunteer Silas Lunetta and athlete Will Cochran were local representatives at the New Hampshire Special Olympics Winter Games at Waterville Valley.



COURTESY PHOTOS

From left, Peter Martel of Bennington, Jay Cox of Greenfield and Larry Martel of Antrim cut wood as part of the Community Wood Bank work day set up by the Grapevine in Antrim.

Students want to help!

Giving back is more important than receiving, a lesson South Meadow School students learn through community service. Students must complete 50 hours of community service to attend the 8th Grade Farewell Ceremony.

The ice storm clean-up effort is a perfect chance for students to satisfy that requirement.

If you have a student with hours to fulfill, or if you're a person in need of assistance, contact **Nina Boyle at 924-7105** for more information.



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