

Mark Wood' s legacy lives in Lincoln mentors

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Lincoln Elementary School in Little Falls has begun a mentoring program, in part because of the legacy of Mark Wood.

Wood mentored four students for three years. He spent a half hour two times a week with each student. When he died, he put his estate into a foundation to assist Lincoln Elementary with at-risk students. He was an adamant proponent of the mentoring program.

The Initiative Foundation has an endowment program that Wood utilized. His estate will be used for mentoring activities that are outside normal school activities and needs.

The program at Lincoln began in January. A mentorship center was created at the school for the sole use of the volunteers and their students. It has two separate areas mentors use to meet with their students. There are games, books and activities that can be utilized. The areas have a light and friendly feel to them, making it easier for the mentors and students to connect.

The goal of this program is to intervene early in the lives of at-risk youth. The main purpose is to provide unconditional time, attention and support to assist children in achieving their

potential and discovering their strengths.

It has been found that youths with a mentoring relationship have better school attendance, a better chance of going on to higher education and better attitudes toward school. Participating in a mentoring program promotes positive social attitudes and relationships. It has also

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been shown that mentoring appears to help prevent substance abuse, reduces some negative behaviors and promotes better child/parent communication.

Both Jane Binger, EB-D teacher, and Anita Larsen, school social worker, sent letters to 50 people they felt would be interested in being mentors. Nineteen responded and agreed to mentor a child for a half hour once a week.

Both the mentors and the students filled out forms that gave Binger and Larsen an idea of what type of person they were and what were their likes and dislikes. The two then did their best to match mentor with student.

"So far," said Larsen, "we have not heard any negatives about the match-ups."

"Parents want as many positive things happening for their kids as possible," said Binger. "We have a need for more mentors here at Lincoln and are also looking to expand to Dr. S. G.

Knight."

Retired dentist Jeff Poehler is one of the 19 mentors who was paired with a student at Lincoln Elementary. He and Charles Koenig, who wants to be a police officer when he grows up, both agree the fit was good.

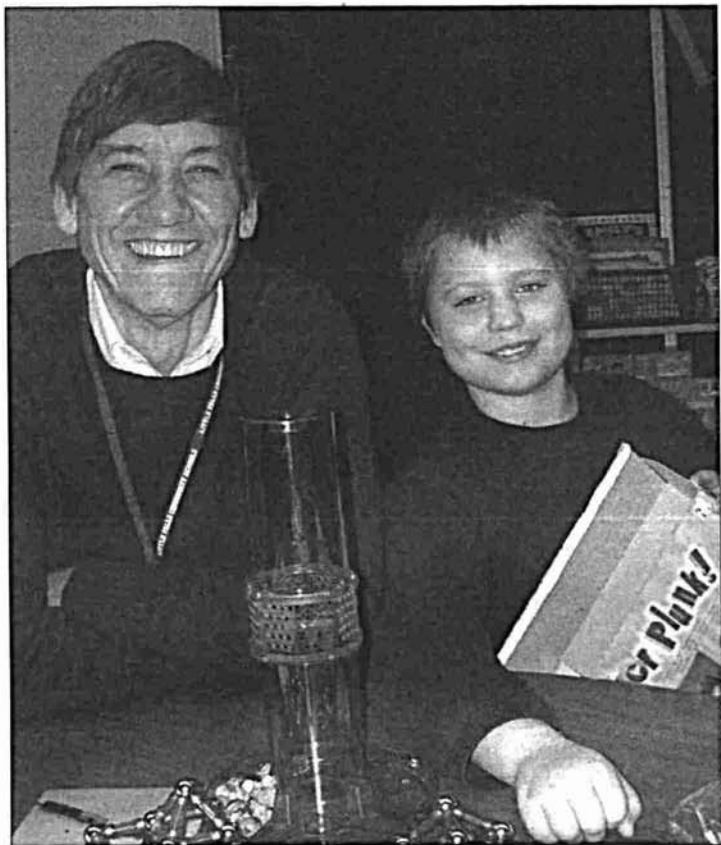
"I'm a little shy," said Poehler. "When I first looked at being a mentor, my uncertainty about doing a good job held me back from joining the program. But, Anita and Jane found me a wonderful student and we have a great time together."

"I'm shy, too," said Koenig, who is in fifth grade. "Jeff and I like the same things. We both have new ideas, but it's not one-sided. We take turns."

Poehler retired early just so he would have the opportunity to make a difference in the world. He is into model trains and wants to share this passion with a young man.

A mentor's role is to be a caring adult friend who devotes time to a young person. Mentors understand they are not meant to replace the role of parent, guardian or teacher. They are not decision-makers or disciplinarians. Instead, a mentor echoes positive values and is a part of a team of caring adults present in a child's life.

"I sincerely hope others in this community will consider becoming a mentor," said Poehler. "When you wonder what to do about crime and abuse in the world, I cannot imagine a better way to make a difference than to be a friend to a child who needs one."



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Staff photo by Tina Snell

Jeff Poehler spends a half hour each week with Charles Koenig in the Lincoln Elementary mentoring program.