

Creating a legacy for our community's future

Nearly one year ago in this column I stated that TEAM is "a very diverse group. We pride ourselves in being inclusive. We welcome everyone, and we mean everyone. Team Punta Gorda volunteers are working people, retired people, from all age groups (yes, we're definitely not all seniors), men, and women." This is all still true. The collaboration of many has brought about significant results.

And we've found yet another way to involve more of our citizenry in the continuous evolution of our community. This is a group that brings a perspective like no other and one that we seasoned professionals cannot match. I hope I've piqued your curiosity by now.

For years now we've identified involving the youth of our community as a goal. If we are going to diversify the community, we must encourage the participation of people of all ages to help us shape it. Since that first meeting last December with three Charlotte High students,

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supportive and involved parents, and experienced TEAM volunteers who are mentoring the students, there are now 35 Charlotte High students involved and the list is growing. Now known as "Jr. TEAM," this group of young citizens is inspired to get involved in the community beyond traditional community service projects.

Jr. TEAM is already providing input to the City of Punta Gorda's parks master plan project and other projects are being identified. We're excited about the endless possibilities of involving Jr. TEAM in the work of our committees and projects under way.

"We need to make the connection

with what we study in school to the businesses and services we can help bring to our community," said Tyler Cardillo, a Charlotte High sophomore. "For me, making a difference will not only have an impact on our community now, but will give myself and others an opportunity to return to a place where we have grown up to further pursue our career paths and interests."

Devina Ganesh, a Charlotte High junior who is planning a career in neonatal care, would love to bring that specialty back here someday. "Being involved with Jr. TEAM is exciting as I start to envision focusing my attention now on something that may benefit me in the future," she said.

TEAM's goal is to make this community one that our young people will want to return to after completing a formal education process; where they will want to live and work, and raise their families.

Gaining admission to universities is a very competitive process and one

where a student must show how they have been able to make a contribution to their home community. These students want to make a difference — a common goal with all of us who participate in TEAM Punta Gorda.

"This is an excellent way to tap the energies and ideas of our youth in Punta Gorda," said Charlotte High Principal Barney Duffy. "They have demonstrated their leadership skills at school. This program will allow them to take it to the next level."

TEAM is excited about the future of Punta Gorda. Jr. TEAM gives us reasons to believe in the legacy that we're creating for the future.

To join Jr. TEAM or TEAM Punta Gorda as a member and/or volunteer, call us at 941-637-8326, e-mail us at team@teampuntagorda.org, or visit our website at www.teampuntagorda.org. Your contributions are also welcome.

And please shop and dine locally! Our entire business community needs and deserves our support!