

Volunteers promote college in KPS

By Barb Walters to the Kalamazoo Gazette.

More than 100 Kalamazoo Rotarians fanned out into 54 Kalamazoo Public School second grade classrooms April 25-29 to help plant the seed of college in the mind of each of more than 1,000 students.

The Rotarians, many wearing apparel from their favorite alma mater, gave each child a book to keep, "I Know I Can," written to begin children thinking about a career and preparation for the future. Rotarians first read the book out loud to the class and discussed the importance of post-high school education with the students. The program is part of KPS's annual College Awareness Week, which involves a number of classroom activities to encourage children to envision themselves going to college.

Planning to attend college is not automatic for many children, even in a community where the Kalamazoo Promise ensures that every qualified graduate will be financially supported at a Michigan public college or university. When a volunteer at one of the schools asked the students what they want to do when they grow up, one second grade girl replied, "Drop out. That's what my auntie did."

Helping to break that cycle of a self-image that does not include post-secondary education is a key goal of the program, along with promoting literacy. Almost all the children showed they have been well-prepared by their teachers to begin thinking about college, and participated eagerly in the discussions, Rotarians reported.

At El Sol Elementary, Rotarian Stephen Walsh read the book in Spanish, with Rotarian Ed Sackley alternating in English. Children said they envisioned themselves being doctors, teachers, and in one case, a pro-wrestler.

At Northeastern Elementary, Rotarian Amy Remmert said that the "kids were great. They sat on the floor in a carpeted area listening intently and were very engaged. They asked lots of questions along with sharing what they knew about college. After we were all done and the kids were getting back into their seats, two little girls came to me and gave me a big hug. This was a very touching moment for me and shows what a little bit of volunteer time can do for a child."

Each child also received a bracelet reading, "I Know I Can."

Nearly half of the club was involved in the project, which was led by **Jim Cupper**. Key Rotarians included **Pam Kingery** of Kalamazoo Community in Schools, **Kevin Brozovich**, who set up meetings with each principal, **Lisa Godfrey**, who braved rain and cold to deliver piles of books

to each school, **Cindy Stewart**, who allowed her downtown furniture business to be used to store the books and host the assembly-line production of packing them, and **Ann Rohrbaugh** of the Kalamazoo Public Library, who set up contact with each school. **Barb Miller**, a Kalamazoo City Commissioner, was scheduled to read a proclamation into the record about the event. **Keith Mumma** took excellent photos.

Members of the Kalamazoo chapter of the American Association of University Women trained the Rotary volunteers before going into the classroom. The program is under the umbrella of “Kalamazoo Communities in Schools.” Kalamazoo Rotary covered the approximately \$7,300 cost of the books, the cost of the bracelets, and intends of undertake the program annually.