National Finalists

CHANUTE, KANSAS

The City of Chanute, population 9,085, is located in southeastern Kansas. In 2005, this struggling rural community engaged in a visioning process to focus on identifying needs and taking action to improve the community. Out of this process, the first formal intergenerational program was developed. A student from Chanute High School, Christian Watkins, stated, “We need school greeters.” Her recommendation was accepted and Chanute High School was the first school in the city to have the greeter program run by the Southeast Kansas Retired Senior Volunteer Program (SEK-RSVP). Since then the school greeters program has expanded to all schools in Chanute.

The simple yet extremely powerful premise of this program is that all students are welcomed as they enter school in the morning. Older adult volunteers at the schools open doors, shake hands, give high fives or even hugs, visit with and share a smile with each student as they enter school. In return, the schools offer breakfast to the volunteers to show their appreciation, as well as providing an official t-shirt and identification badge.

Around the same time the Vision Committee proposed the intergenerational greeter program, the idea for an intergenerational baseball game through Neosho County Community College originated. The first intergenerational baseball game took place in the following spring of 2006. The success of bringing the generations together sharing in America’s favorite pastime created an annual event with increased sponsorship and attendance each year.

The creative and ongoing program development of intergenerational activities in Chanute has built and strengthened the atmosphere of community and provided an environment that enhances the lives of all generations. Neosho County Community College and Southeast Kansas Retired Senior Volunteer Program (SEK-RSVP) spearhead this intergenerational movement and partner with other community members, organizations, businesses, schools and government who are committed to promoting and supporting an intergenerational community.