

# HEALTH & WELL-BEING @ ISSUE

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**YOUTH  
VOLUNTEER  
CORPS**



THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

*Bolton High School senior Shannon Osteen and teacher Randy Smith attend a recent meeting of the Bolton High YVC Club.*

## IN THIS ISSUE

- YVC Clubs Give Students Service Opportunities | 2
- Cenla Students Attend 2019 SECO Expo | 8
- Healthy Lifestyle Program | 12
- Cenla Boardbuilders Seeking Participants, Nonprofit Partners | 15

# YVC CLUBS

Give High School Students  
Service Opportunities



*Bolton High School's YVC Club meets regularly to plan volunteer service opportunities throughout the school year.*





# YOUTH VOLUNTEER CORPS

*Hornbeck High YVC Club members illustrate an exercise depicting what their perfect neighborhood would look like.*

**H**igh school students throughout Central Louisiana are learning the benefits and rewards of helping others through their involvement in school-based community service clubs called YVC (Youth Volunteer Corps) Clubs. The clubs are funded through a Youth Volunteer School District Grant opportunity under The Rapides Foundation's My Civic Life Program.

My Civic Life, which is part of the Foundation's Healthy Communities Priority Area, promotes civic and community engagement through volunteerism. My Civic Life is comprised of four components: YVC Clubs, leadership development training through a regional Youth Advisory Board; capacity building resources for nonprofits working with youth volunteers; and an online platform to connect young people with volunteer opportunities in their local communities.

"My Civic Life is intended to create future community leaders by giving high school students the opportunity to become engaged in their communities," said Joe Rosier, President and CEO of The Rapides Foundation. "Local nonprofits benefit by having help on their projects and events. Our hope is that students become involved in their communities when they reach adulthood and make volunteerism a lifelong habit."

The Rapides Foundation launched a pilot of My Civic Life in the spring of 2017, with Community Development Works, a program of The Rapides Foundation, leading the YVC Clubs. Beginning with the 2018-19 school year, the Foundation began offering the Youth Volunteer School District Grant opportunity to the nine school districts in Central Louisiana, with grant amounts depending on the number of participating schools.

Today, YVC Clubs are in 15 schools in Natchitoches, Rapides and Vernon parishes, with 512 students participating. So far this school year, students have recorded more than 3,600 service hours volunteering in their communities. Service projects, which vary by school, have included students collecting food for the needy, reading to elementary school children, volunteering at nursing homes and daycares, sending care packages and cards to deployed service members and working major fundraisers for local nonprofits.

The Foundation is currently accepting applications from school districts for the 2020-21 school year. Applications are due by May 1. Visit [www.rapidesfoundation.org](http://www.rapidesfoundation.org) and click on the Grants tab.

Central Louisiana YVC Clubs follow the national Youth Volunteer Corps model, which has the mission of creating volunteer opportunities to address community needs and to inspire youth for



*Hornbeck High School teacher Alison James incorporates service-learning activities at monthly YVC meetings to help student members fully understand the impact of their community service.*

a lifetime commitment to service. As a national affiliate, the Cenla clubs receive training, support and yearly evaluations to ensure they are meeting goals and adhering to the program model. Last fall, the Cenla affiliate was recognized for achieving Gold Level status, an award reserved for only a limited number of exemplary YVC programs throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Under the Youth Volunteer School District Grant agreement, each Central Louisiana YVC Club designates a teacher or school employee to oversee club activities. School coordinators facilitate monthly YVC Club meetings, guiding student members as they plan and implement four community service projects every school year. One project typically follows the national YVC theme.

Meetings feature a service-learning component that is designed to make volunteer projects relevant and meaningful, and a reflection component where students reflect on the impact of their past service projects.

“If you look at all of the research, the common finding is that a student’s likelihood to continue volunteering is largely dependent upon their first volunteer experience, so we want to make sure that their first experience is enjoyable. That usually means that it is well planned and thought out, that the students feel included and involved in the project, and that they take time to reflect on the project and see the impact of their efforts,” said Matt LaBorde, a Program Officer for The Rapides Foundation who directs YVC activities.

At Hornbeck High School, teacher Alison James incorporates a service-learning activity at monthly meetings, giving the 20-25 members a way to fully understand the impact of their service. One activity was a poverty simulation, where students were assigned different incomes and budgets and then had to make real-life decisions about how to spend their money.

“They got to experience what a lot of families have to deal with every month. They’d have to make choices, like if you only have \$30 left, do you buy the toilet paper that you need or pay the phone bill? Not easy choices, and some of them ran out of money before the end of the month,” she said. “With homelessness, sometimes there is this stigma that they probably wasted their money on drugs, have made bad choices or whatever. So through the poverty simulation students were able to make real-life choices. It was an eye-opening situation for them, and they learned that maybe people end up that way not because of bad choices, but because it’s the only choice they have.”

To prepare club members for a volunteer project with senior citizens, James read students the poem “If I Had My Life to Live Over Again” about an elderly woman who reflects on her life and realizes some decisions didn’t matter. The discussion opened the students’ eyes, made them think about their own life choices and had them excited about talking to senior citizens about

their lives. "It turned to, 'I can't wait to talk to these people, I want to talk to them about some of the experiences they had.' Not many high school students are willing to do that. But they are excited about going and spending time with them and actually talking to them; not just playing games with them. Talking to them," she said.

YVC Clubs are generally open to anyone at the high school. In addition to posting signup sheets, teachers try to invite and encourage students who may not be in many clubs but who show great potential. Most, if not all, rise to the challenge.

Randy Smith, Bolton High School's teacher coordinator, said students are flattered and inspired when he asks them to join. "We accept anyone, but I also like to have kids that I know aren't involved in anything else. I think it is important to have a reason to come to school other than just school, even it's because we're having a meeting that day for Youth Volunteer Corps or we have a project coming up and they know they have to be there. I want it to be their thing," he said.

Bolton High has about 15 active club members whose projects have included working the Alexandria Zoo Boo and Alexandria Mall's Santa event, and reading to children at Huddle Elementary, a school many of the high school students attended. Projects are generally within walking distance from the school to give students a sense of buy-in into their community and because transportation can be a challenge.

"I think it's important because I think some kids don't get that buy-in anywhere else. They go to school and then they go home. So I like getting them out to meet new people. I like getting them to interact with a diverse group of people. I like putting them in situations where they may feel uncomfortable," Smith said.

Bolton High School senior Shannon Osteen said he "wasn't making some smart decisions" during his junior year when Smith pulled him aside and asked him to join YVC. Since then, YVC has given him confidence, new friends and a renewed sense of purpose. "When I help other people it makes me feel better," he said. "Now I know I can make a positive impact on somebody's day."



*Bolton High School teacher Randy Smith said many members are not involved in other school clubs, but rise to the challenge of YVC: "I think it is important to have a reason to come to school other than just school. ... I want it to be their thing."*

YVC membership gives students a sense of community, and also provides them with leadership skills and the ability to step out of their comfort zones. Shannon, for example, was hesitant to put on a gingerbread man costume and dance with little kids at the mall's annual Santa event. "I'm really not a dancer. But I was making people laugh so I kept going," he said. "There are more people like me in the world who want to do good but are scared. But if you do it, you have the opportunity to change and do great things."

Pineville High School junior Hannah Culp helped start Pineville High School's YVC Club last year. Today, the club has 30 members who enjoy taking ownership of their club's service projects, which have included visiting children in the hospital, sending care packages to service



## YOUTH VOLUNTEER CORPS

*Pineville High School YVC member Hannah Culp: "I think the majority of members will leave high school with a different idea of service than when they came into high school."*

members and reading to children at J.I. Barron Elementary.

"At YVC we got to choose what service projects we want to do. We have that creative freedom, the ability to do what we want to do, based on how we feel we could best serve and give back to the community," Hannah said. As a club leader, Hannah enjoys watching her fellow classmates step up and take on leadership roles. "It's rewarding for all of us to grow and show leadership skills – having that faith in ourselves to make a difference and to see what we are capable of."

In addition to the school-level YVC clubs, My Civic Life offers leadership development training through a Youth Advisory Board, consisting of students from local YVC Clubs. Advisory members meet quarterly and also participate in an annual community outreach project. Last year, Youth Advisory Board members volunteered with the Good Food Project by planting, weeding and harvesting potatoes at an Alexandria community garden.

Hannah, who was accepted to serve as one of eight members of the Foundation's regional Youth Advisory Board, enjoys sharing ideas, challenges and successes with her peers at the quarterly meetings. "During these meetings we have a 'what's your problem' kind of conversation where we talk about what we are most struggling

with, and the more developed clubs are like, 'Well, this is what we did to help with that.' Everybody pitches in to help out," she said. "Our community outreach allows us all to come together. These are teenagers wanting to make a difference."

Another goal of YVC is to help serve the unmet needs of the community by providing local nonprofits with young and energetic volunteers.

Jamie Hanley from the Louisiana National Guard's Office of Family Programs said the success of many of the guard's programs would not be possible without the help of Pineville High School YVC volunteers. "I love the idea of young people volunteering. It not only creates opportunities and teaches valuable skills, but provides them with an opportunity to give back to their community."

Rapides High School's YVC Club helped work Lecompte's fourth-annual Breast Cancer Walk. "I was very satisfied with the group. Everything I asked of them was done immediately and with care! They even went the extra mile with taking on other job duties without having to ask," event organizer Tiffany Conaler said.

Roxanne LaBorde-Couvillion from the Central Area Special Olympics said she'd love for Tioga High School's YVC Club to help with all of the group's events. "This is just what we needed to make our event successful. The volunteers were kind, friendly, helpful, and on time. They were

great! We liked the promptness and eagerness of the volunteers.”

Gail Robertson from Six Mile Food Pantry said the volunteers from Oak Hill High School’s YVC Club were amazing workers. “They are very respectful and work well together. This group is a major help to our agency.”

Last fall, YVC Clubs were given the option of participating in the region’s first #CANstructure competition by collecting canned goods and turning them into creative structures. Food collected for the competition was donated to local food pantries or the regional food bank. Eleven YVC Clubs participated in the event, with Youth Advisory Board members serving as judges for the most creative structure. That award went to Rapides High, where students created a popcorn-themed structure. Glenmora High won an award for collecting the most cans. In all, close to 4,500 cans were collected by the participating YVC Clubs.

My Civic Life also offers an online platform that provides students with volunteer and service opportunities throughout the year, beyond their YVC club requirements. Students visit the Community Development Works website, hit the My Civic Life tab and navigate to the Youth

Volunteer Connection portal.

As an incentive, students who perform more than 80 hours of community service through YVC can earn a Community Service Diploma Endorsement through the Louisiana Department of Education. This endorsement shows potential employers the student’s work skills and commitment. YVC Club members average about 30 hours of volunteer service each year.

But for club members, YVC is more than a credit or an entry on a job or college application. Membership gives them a sense of purpose and accomplishment. They volunteer because they like helping others and because they know it’s the right thing to do.

“What is the reward? I think the reward is seeing the little kids’ faces light up when we work with the children, or seeing the fruits of our labor when we work in that community garden and seeing the difference we made. I think the majority of members will leave high school with a different idea of service than when they came into high school,” Hannah said. “I really love community service and I definitely see myself doing this in my future, giving back and serving my community. And I believe you are never too young to make a difference.”



## #CANstructure

*Top left: Rapides High School YVC Club's popcorn structure won the award for Most Creative Structure in the region's first #CANstructure competition.*



*Bottom left: Glenmora High School won the award for collecting the most cans. In all, Cenla clubs collected close to 4,500 cans and donated them to local food pantries.*



# CENLA STUDENTS ATTEND 2019 **SECO** Expo



See the SECO Photo Gallery at [rapidesfoundation.org](http://rapidesfoundation.org)





## Annual SECO Event Introduces Central Louisiana Students to Career Possibilities

**S**tudents Exploring Career Opportunities (SECO), an interactive career expo for Central Louisiana tenth grade students, was held November 20 and 21, 2019, at the Randolph Riverfront Center. This was the sixth SECO event presented by The Orchard Foundation, The Rapides Foundation and the nine public school districts in Central Louisiana.

SECO is designed to introduce students to career possibilities and allows participants to

experience simulations and hands-on activities at a variety of stations staffed by area businesses. The goal is to foster student engagement and ultimately spark an interest in future careers.

Over the two-day period, almost 2,800 students from 56 public and private schools within nine Central Louisiana parishes attended the SECO expo. Participating parishes were Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, Grant, LaSalle, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon and Winn. The event is funded by The Rapides Foundation, Blue Cross and Blue



Shield of Louisiana, Capital One, Sam's Club, Walmart Neighborhood Market in Alexandria, Super 1 Foods in Alexandria and St. Romain Oil Company.

Marjorie Taylor, Executive Director of The Orchard Foundation, explained the purpose of SECO is to allow tenth grade students to learn about different career opportunities available in Central Louisiana and the requirements of those careers, so they will be better informed to choose a path into the workforce. "In the tenth grade, students have to make a very important decision that affects the rest of their high school career. They have to decide if they're going to pursue the

University Diploma when they graduate or if they want to go directly into the workforce," Taylor said.

Tenth grade students must choose to pursue the TOPS University Diploma or the Jump Start TOPS Tech Diploma at the end of their sophomore year based on the Louisiana Department of Education's plan to implement these pathways to help prepare students for future success.

Fifty Cenla businesses set up interactive exhibits to represent various career clusters. Through participation in SECO, business and community leaders play an active role in helping students make informed career decisions, while making a long-term investment for a better Cenla workforce in the future.





Each year, students participating in SECO vote on their favorite interactive industry displays in each of the four zones. Winners of the 2019 Student Choice Awards were:

**Zone 1**

- First Place: Grant High School Emergency Medical Responder Class and MedExpress
- Second Place: Rapides Parish Sheriff's Office
- Third Place: CHRISTUS Cabrini Hospital

**Zone 2**

- First Place: Louisiana Army National Guard
- Second Place: Gilchrist Construction Company and CAT
- Third Place: LSUA Department of Allied Health

**Zone 3**

- First Place: Procter and Gamble
- Second Place: RoyOMartin
- Third Place: Hunt Forest Products and LaSalle Lumber Company

**Zone 4**

- First Place: Unitech Training Academy
- Second Place: LSUA Department of Education
- Third Place: Louisiana Workforce Commission  
Rapides Business and Career Solutions Center



# Healthy Lifestyle Program

Offers Individualized Nutrition, Physical Activity Counseling



Call to Learn More  
**318-767-3019**



Healthy Lifestyle Program staff members assist clients with their needs. They are, from left, Administrative Assistant Courtney Keys, Registered Dietitian Pamela Jones, Exercise Specialist Lydia Kozlowski and Healthy Lifestyle Program Coordinator Kira Davidson.

**T**he Rapides Foundation’s Healthy Lifestyle Program provides Central Louisiana residents with individualized nutrition and physical activity counseling they can use for the rest of their lives. The requirement to be accepted into this free program is a doctor’s referral.

A registered dietitian and an exercise specialist work individually with each client during the six-month program. Clients learn behavior changes they can take with them when they complete the program. This includes understanding portion control, eating the proper amount of fruits and vegetables, learning how to read nutrition labels and plan meals, and learning

how to incorporate physical activity into daily life.

Clients have included people who need help managing their diabetes; heart patients who need to make lifestyle changes for their health; and people of all ages who are obese or overweight. The goal is to help everyone learn how to make healthy choices long after they complete the program, said CMAP Healthy Lifestyle Program Coordinator Kira Davidson, a Licensed and Registered Dietitian.

To enroll, ask your physician for a referral. The Healthy Lifestyle Program currently works with more than 300 doctors in Central Louisiana, so it is likely that yours is already familiar with the program. Physicians assess a potential client’s need to make a lifestyle change and their level of



*Healthy Lifestyle Program clients receive one-on-one counseling with Registered Dietitians Pamela Jones, left, and Kira Davidson, learning behaviors they can use for the rest of their lives.*

readiness to change. The physician then sends the referral to the Healthy Lifestyle Program, and the client will be contacted for a one-on-one consultation.

If your physician is not already a part of the network, ask him or her to contact the Healthy Lifestyle Program for a referral form or call the Healthy Lifestyle Program at 318-767-3019 for assistance.

Once in the program, clients are counseled for six months. The Healthy Lifestyle Program's registered dietitian tracks a client's progress throughout the program, assessing their eating habits, behavior changes, weight and inches lost, as well as growing in their knowledge on proper nutrition and physical activity. The dietitian will assess the needs of each client to make realistic and healthy goals.

Once the client and the dietitian establish goals and a plan to meet those goals, the Healthy Lifestyle Program's exercise specialist

will monitor and track the client's progress. The exercise specialist will ensure the plan is being followed and clients are getting the appropriate care. The exercise specialist also provides clients with individualized, easy-to-follow exercise routines.

Central Louisiana physicians say they enjoy having a place to send their patients for consistent nutrition and exercise education. Doctors also say that diseases become easier to control when patients modify their diets and increase their physical activity.

The Healthy Lifestyle Program is currently working with 200 clients from Central Louisiana.

The program is funded by the Foundation's Healthy Behaviors Initiative and administered by CMAP, the Cenla Medication Access Program. The Healthy Behaviors Initiative addresses tobacco use, substance and alcohol abuse prevention, healthy eating and active living.





## CENLA Boardbuilders

### Seeking Participants, Nonprofits

**C**ommunity Development Works is recruiting participants and nonprofit partners for the 2020 session of Cenla Boardbuilders, a program aimed at developing emerging leaders for service on boards of local nonprofit organizations. The deadline for participants to apply is June 15.

The free program is open to professionals identified by their employer as “up-and-coming” leaders with a desire for greater community involvement, nonprofit board members wanting an orientation to their new role on a board, or individuals who may be retired, self-employed, or looking for higher-level volunteer opportunities. Interested nonprofit board members must be from a nonprofit with an actively engaged board with a working committee structure.

The program runs August through October and consists of a series of sessions about the roles and responsibilities of being an effective board member. Participants choose between two learning tracks for the program: Track I is for newly seated board members with limited service experience who are only seeking training; Track II is for individuals with no previous board service who are seeking training in preparation for nonprofit board service and help to connect with local nonprofits.

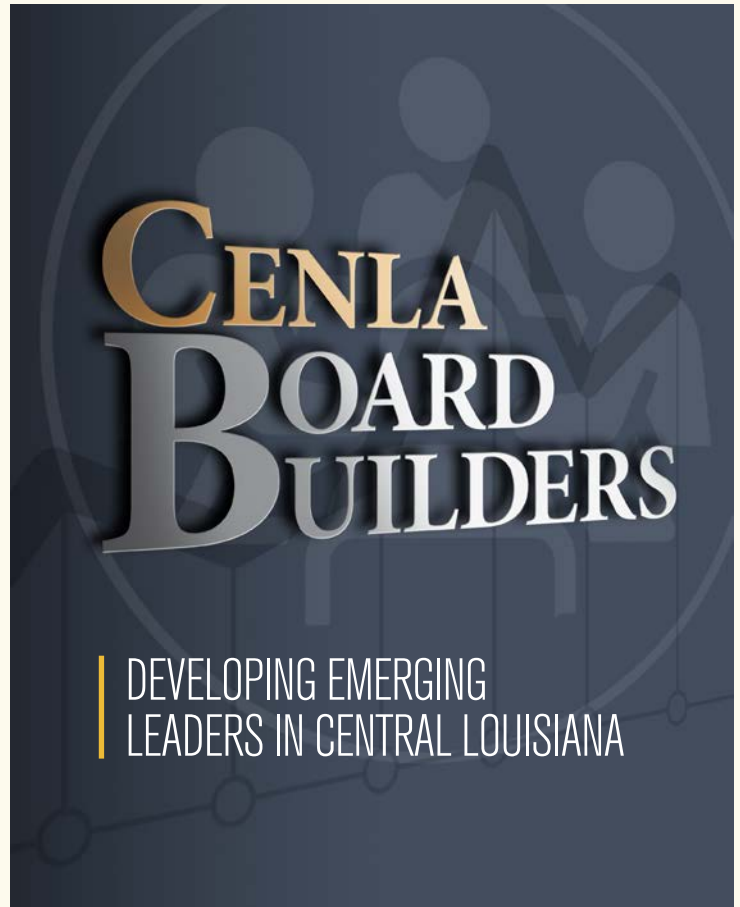
The program includes a networking lunch and a recruitment session that give participants and nonprofit leaders a chance to connect. These networking opportunities allow participants to learn about different organizations that meet their interests, and it gives nonprofits the chance to recruit new, energetic board members.

## CENLA BOARDBUILDERS

Nonprofit organizations who are looking to recruit new members for their boards of directors are encouraged to apply to be a nonprofit partner. Nonprofit partners are asked to commit the executive director and at least one board member to participate in a networking lunch and a recruitment session in the fall. These events will require total commitment time of less than four hours. The board member will serve as the board mentor to any new Cenla Boardbuilders participant recruited to the nonprofit's board of directors.

Local employers are encouraged to sponsor their emerging professionals for participation in the program, allowing for a meaningful professional development opportunity for the employee and community development opportunity for the organization.

To learn more about joining the 2020 program either as a participant, nonprofit partner or employer partner, visit [www.communitydevelopmentworks.org](http://www.communitydevelopmentworks.org) or call CDW toll-free at 800-803-8075. Community Development Works is a program of The Rapides Foundation.



### THE RAPIDES FOUNDATION

The Rapides Foundation continues a legacy of community healthcare initiated in 1903.

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