

Program allows Pangburn students to be heroes

SHERRY SNOW/Contributing Writer

PANGBURN — Leaving a legacy by finding the “hero within” is in evidence at Pangburn High School as students join a new club.

But the program — A Hero Within — is not exclusive; rather, it includes all aspects of campus life, focusing on bringing students together and strengthening the culture of the student body.

Students wear yellow rubber wristbands inscribed with the slogan “Make today count.”

And in doing this, they are coming up with projects and ideas on their own in this student-led group — things like holding a car wash to help defray expenses for a custodian battling cancer, and deciding on their own to help that custodian with some chores, like taking out the trash, Principal David Rolland said. Other projects include reading to elementary-school students to foster learning and teach manners and respect; and seniors mentoring freshmen to better

things Vitale had discussed, Rolland said. Vitale was contacted, and he encouraged this pilot project on the high school campus.

“The ultimate picture is, I would like for other schools to see what is being done and maybe implement [the activities]. This can really snowball,” Rolland said.

Rolland and Stacy Hopkins, district business manager, are the facilitators for the club.

“Magnifying what is good — this is what this is showing,” Rolland said. When much in today’s media about youth is negative, he said, the club offers “a counterbalance” to the image of what is seen.

Teens from all clubs and areas of activities are getting involved. About 70 so far have joined out of the 235 ninth-through 12th-graders enrolled at the school. There are no dues, and if a student attends a meeting, then decides he or she does not want to join, there are no negatives attached, Rolland said.

Athletes, cheerleaders, and members of FFA, band and choir, Beta Club, the Spanish Club, the Bible Club, the Journalism Club, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the Future Business Leaders of America and the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America are all taking part in A Hero Within Club.

“It is unique. You do not have to be an athlete or ‘popular.’ They, too, are in the club, yes, but it is inclusive of others,” Rolland said.

Mixed-up Mondays have taken place where students are encouraged to sit with someone at lunch besides their usual friends.

“In life, you do not always know who you will come in contact with,” Hopkins said.

The Bible Club invites others to join its 7:45 a.m. prayer sessions, held outside on Fridays. Twenty to 30 children take part as they march around the high school and pray.

Reading to third-grade language-arts students is an education for the young children and the older students. When *Charlotte’s Web* is read, the children are



Pangburn High School junior Logan Wolfe, left, and freshman Timothy Bloxom read to Susan Ramsey’s third-grade Language Arts class as part of the Hero Within club.

rapt and quiet, studying high school junior Logan Wolfe and

Timothy Bloxom, a freshman, as they take turns reading the classic tale. Teacher Susan Ramsey, after the session, said to the children, “It’s kind of fun to listen to someone else read, especially someone with a deep voice!”

Hopkins added that with parents sometimes searching for ways to spend time with their children, reading together is one meaningful option.

As for the mentoring, Michael Williams, a senior, is enjoying helping freshman Barry Whitehurst adjust to high school life.

“I used to be where he is,” said Michael, a leader in the Bible Club. “This is the first time we have had the opportunity to make a difference.”

A Hero Within Club members eat lunch together once a week to touch base, and to “see where we are at, develop new ideas and remind everyone of what we are doing,” said Barry, who plays trumpet in the school band.

“I am astounded,” Rolland said, “at what the students come up with. They are really good kids.”

Trying to find projects to work on to have a positive effect and help the school be more unified is a focus of the group.

For impact and visibility, Hero Within members volunteer to make the morning announcements and give a quote of the day, Rolland said.

One big part of A Hero Within Club is joining Dolly Parton’s efforts in the



“A Hero Within—Today’s Youth, Tomorrow’s Leaders” Program Founder Paul Vitale with Pangburn High School students after his recent character-development assembly.

prepare them for all that high school life entails.

A Hero Within Club stemmed from a talk by motivational speaker Paul Vitale. After his speech, students flocked to Rolland’s office, asking if they could put into practice at the school some of the

Imaginary Library project, in which from the time a baby is born, a set of books is provided, and each month that child gets a book relative to his or her age. Parton's focus is "developing early reading skills," Rolland said.

It was the students' plan to find a gift for newborns to influence their education on down the line, and they came to him, and amid his researching, he found the Parton foundation's plan. The district may be the first in the area to take advantage of this program. Augusta and Maumelle are two other school districts Hopkins mentioned as being onboard.

"But we are the first in White and Cleburne counties," Hopkins said. The Pangburn School District overlaps into the two counties. Hopkins and two students

will attend an annual state summit to get training and help launch the program.

"Eighty-nine to 90 percent of childhood cognitive development is before kindergarten," Rolland said. "If we can get a family reading to kids — preschoolers — it will really add to the education of the community. How important, if you can have every kid in kindergarten reading."

The district is learning how Parton's foundation researches and "finds" those children who need the books, Hopkins said. "I have been blown away by their grasp of needs in the community," she said of the nationwide program. "Kids are reading way above [their] level."

"Literacy is basic. We may be one of the few school districts [to participate].

Mrs. Hopkins did the legwork, and we are fortunate our timing was right." Rolland said.

Students want to leave a legacy, Rolland and Hopkins said. And through Vitale's *A Hero Within—Today's Youth, Tomorrow's Leaders* Program and the corresponding club they've created, there is no doubt they will.

"Together, they can reach all kids in school. It will become the peer pressure here — not a negative but a positive peer pressure — getting kids on the right side of the fence," Rolland said.

For more information on Vitale's program and how to implement it in your area, visit www.aherowithin.com or contact Paul Vitale at 501-663-1454.