

# 'Blue Crew' Making A Difference At GJHS

By Dave Bell

There may not be a tougher testing ground for new ideas than junior high, but Laura Miller was up for the challenge.

The seventh-grade language arts teacher at Greenville Junior High School thought there was room for a new type of student group — one that rewards character and involves students in service projects.

And she wanted it to be for the students who may not fit in the existing groups that already had considerable social power (athletes, band participants and other student leaders).

Thus, this fall, she introduced the Blue Crew — a new kind of leadership group for those who previously had been on the outside looking in.

"I was pleasantly surprised at how enthusiastic and excited they were," said Miller. "Some of these kids never would've had opportunities for leadership in any other way."

The goals of the group consist of equal parts of providing opportunities to grow character and to show character.

To launch the group, 22 students were selected. To be considered for

membership, they had to have a C or better in all their classes, be free of disciplinary problems, have the recommendation of a teacher and have their parents' permission.

"We have kids from every clique and all socio-economic groups," Miller said. "I didn't know what to expect, but so far, they've worked together very well."

To date, they've worked on several successful projects:

- They helped unload the truck that brings food from the Illinois Food Bank, and then repackaged the materials prior to distribution at a recent food pantry.

- They are organizing a food drive at the school, including a contest to see which class donates the most food products.

- At Thanksgiving time, group members wrote thank-you letters, and baked cookies and brownies for each employee at the junior high — writing specific letters to each employee telling them why they're special.

- At Halloween, they sponsored a "Halloween Lunch Bash," during which students were assigned new seats in the lunchroom.

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"They were sitting with a whole new group of people than they would normally associate with," Miller said. "Hopefully, it started relationships."

- And, recently, they've volunteered to hand out programs at a band concert and greet parents as they come to the building for parent-teacher conferences.

"The kids love to help out," Miller said. "They're already talking about other activities we can do in the second semester. They especially liked the mix-it-up lunches."

Even the teachers are taking notice as the group affirms them.

"The teachers loved the letters from

the students," Miller said. "And studies show that happy teachers make for a more positive school culture."

To further cement the Blue Crew's status as a popular group within the school, Miller printed distinctive "spirit shirts" this fall. They sold like hotcakes.

The success of this new group hasn't gone unnoticed by the GJHS administration.

"We've been stressing character education in the district," said Principal Gary Brauns, "and it's even more powerful when it comes from another student. The Blue Crew has been a wonderful addition to the school."