

RENSSELAER Republican

Celebrating 140 Years

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Are you seeking a challenge in your life?

by Dave Ake, dave@rensselaerrepUBLICAN.com

RENSSELAER - An open invitation has been sent to the public to attend an orientation and learn about a youth intervention program from the Hoosier Youth Challenge Academy.

The orientation takes place from 5-7 p.m. November 6 at the Rensselaer National Guard Armory and invites at-risk teenagers and their families to come learn how the Challenge Academy could be a step taken in a positive direction.

The Challenge Academy is a program sponsored by the National Guard that allows at-risk youth the opportunity to learn valuable life skills, earn their G.E.D. and complete a difficult curriculum that emphasizes eight core components.



Mike Ayers

The Challenge Academy prides itself on its implementation of eight core components designed to train and mentor young lives. Before graduating, Challenge cadets will need master leadership/followership, responsible citizenship, academic excellence, job skills, life coping skills, health and hygiene, service to their community and physical fitness.

Representatives of the academy will be present at the orientation to give a detailed outline of what Challenge cadets should expect before enrolling in the program.

Q. & A. with Challenge Academy Regional RPM Assistant Mike Ayers
Q. How did you become involved with the Challenge academy?

A. I became intrigued when I read about the program in an Internet search and found Indiana was opening an academy. In my experiences as a substitute teacher, nothing was better than helping a student with a complicated problem, either personal or scholastic, and see the light bulb flash over their heads. I enjoy working with children and with a teenager of my own, try to set a positive example for him to emulate.

Q. How would you explain the program in your own words?

A. It is a program which can be life-altering, if you follow its doctrine of

discipline and setting goals. We not only want to raise your education levels, but also to provide examples of what you will need to prosper as an adult. We show this by using checking accounts for the cadets, and when they purchase an item, they must balance that account. This is but one example of what young people in Rensselaer and Jasper county can expect when they attend the Hoosier Youth ChalleNGe Academy.

Q. Do a lot of graduates choose to enter military service after graduating from ChalleNGe?

In truth, nationwide about 30 percent of the 70,000 graduates of the 33 other ChalleNGe academies have enlisted in military service.

Q. What are some of the best skills a cadet will learn at the ChalleNGe Academy?

A. In our holistic approach, we look to increase the skills of the person, not just the mind. Balancing a checkbook, making a budget and learning how to live within that budget, learning ways to deal with stress in a non-threatening or self-destructive manner (such as self-medicating with your favorite concoction), understanding that physical fitness and eating well go hand in hand and that both can prolong your lifetime, these are just a few of the lessons cadets can obtain through the Hoosier Youth ChalleNGe Academy.

Q. Has the program been successful in the other areas that sponsor it?

A. YES! In the Lincoln ChalleNGe at Rantoul, Ill., they have corporate sponsors which provide scholarships for students to further their education, whether scholastic or trade schools. We are pursuing corporate sponsors for our program as well, but being a new program, we must prove ourselves worthy of the benevolence.

Q. Why would you recommend this program to an at risk youth in Rensselaer?

A. In a nutshell, nationwide, the average yearly earnings for high school dropouts comes in at just over \$16,400 a year. Contrast those numbers with the average high school graduate's earnings of just over \$26,000 per year. Without some formal documentation of a high school education, your economic opportunities are very limited.

Q. In what ways do you feel a ChalleNGe graduate benefits their community?

A. Realistically, by electing to advance themselves at our program, they increase the odds that they will not be on the government rolls for welfare and food stamps. This might sound harsh, but some economists have estimated that the potential cost to taxpayers over the course of a high school dropouts lifetime nears 260 billion dollars. Our academy provides opportunities to learn how to increase their future economic opportunities through work experiences, by using Internet searches, job banks, WorkOne

and by using the Ivy Tech career assessment test, we can provide these young people where their best chances for successes lie upon graduation from our academy.

Q. Any success stories you would like to share?

A. As we are in our initial class right now, we do not have success stories per se, however, you can read former cadet testimonials from other academies online at www.ngycp.org, clicking on the testimonial links. That said, we look to provide success stories from our cadets now on campus in the near future!

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