



# COUNTY OF KENOSHA

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News release

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Summer Youth Employment Program pays dividends for kids, community**

KENOSHA – Roughly 200 teens participated this year in Kenosha County’s Summer Youth Employment Program, which is wrapping up for the season at the end of this week.

Administered by Kenosha County Gang Intervention Supervisor Donna Rhodes in a public-private partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Kenosha and other community stakeholders, the program provides at-risk youths ages 14-21 with eight weeks of paid work at public- and private-sector jobsites throughout the county. This year, there were 36 worksites.

Participating Kenosha Unified School District students also have the opportunity to earn a half credit toward their high school graduation.

The youths are referred to the program by the county Division of Children and Family Services, Community Impact Programs, the Boys & Girls Club, Kenosha Unified and other social service agencies. Wages, subsidized by the county, are \$7.25 per hour for teens ages 14-17, \$8 an hour for those 18-21.

Asked what he liked best about participating in the program, Tre-Shawn Moore-Thomas was quick to answer, “The money!”

While Moore-Thomas – a 16-year-old Indian Trail High School and Academy student – is counting on that cash to help out with some back-to-school shopping, the community has benefitted from the program in many other ways since its inception in 2009.

Statistics suggest the program has helped to reduce juvenile arrests.

In 2008, the last year before the program began, there were 1,140 juvenile arrests in Kenosha County. The following year, with 296 youths employed in the summer program, there were 712 juvenile arrests – a 48 percent decline from the previous year. Those arrest totals have continued to decline each year, down to 327 in 2016, a 72 percent decrease from the 2008 figure.

“The results are clear,” County Executive Jim Kreuser said. “The benefits of this program – to the youths who participate and to the community at large – far outweigh the costs of administering it and paying the participants for their hard work.”

At Reuther High School on a recent Tuesday morning, a team of about 20 teens, ages 14 and 15, were hard at work painting murals when Kreuser, Human Services Director John Jansen and Division of Children and Family Services Director Ron Rogers dropped in for a visit.

Led by Jameisse Sims, direct supervisor with the Boys & Girls Club, these students were working for the Youth Employment in the Arts program, creating public art that will hang in the Kenosha County Job Center building and elsewhere in the community.

“I appreciate you participating. Hopefully you’re getting value out of it,” Kreuser told the young workers. “I’m really proud of the great work you’re doing.”

Sims is an example of the path on which the Summer Youth Employment Program aims to send the youths who participate.

A participant in Boys & Girls Club programming since she was 13, Sims received the club’s 2011 Youth of the Year award. She’s now soon to graduate with a nursing degree from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

“I just enjoy giving back to the kids,” Sims said. “It’s always nice to know that you can overcome anything.”

The program’s work has involved some heavy lifting in Kenosha County’s parks, recognized last year when the program received the 2016 Silver Star Award from the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association.

This year, youths are again busy at Petrifying Springs and Fox River parks, doing a wide variety of work, including cleanup of flood damage, painting playground equipment, installing fencing, removing invasive species, planting perennials and improving hiking trails.

Private-employer participants include: Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Sugar Boxx, Festival Foods, Rhodes Auto & Truck Repair, and Baker Street Restaurant & Pub.

Late in July, a crew was pulled off the job at Petrifying Springs to spend a few days at the Westosha Senior Community Center in Bristol, clearing brush from a severely overgrown fence line and weeding alongside a walking path on the property.

“The kids are doing fabulously,” said Sandy Jacoby, a volunteer with the center. “I was amazed at how far they got in one day.”

Kevin Alvarez, a 15-year-old Hillcrest School student, was a part of that team, and he hopes to be back in the program next year.

“It’s a great work experience for us young people so, later on, we can get a bigger job,” Alvarez said.

In addition to making some money and getting some work experience, Alvarez is also learning other life lessons in the program.

“You have to use teamwork,” he said, as his crew hacked away at a line of overgrown bushes. “A lot of teamwork.”

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