



COUNTY OF KENOSHA

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Jim Kreuser, County Executive

1010 – 56th Street, Third Floor

Kenosha, Wisconsin 53140

(262) 653-2600

Fax: (262) 653-2817

September 19, 2020

News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Joe Potente

262-653-2802

Kenosha County's Summer Youth Employment Program celebrates another successful season

KENOSHA — Kenosha County's Summer Youth Employment Program marked another successful year in 2020, providing work skills and life lessons to nearly 90 at-risk youth in the community.

The program, which recently wrapped up its 12th season, aims to teach these skills while also decreasing juvenile crime and gang involvement in Kenosha County.

“The Summer Youth Employment Program is a more-than-worthwhile investment in our present and our future,” said County Executive Jim Kreuser, who has championed the initiative since its inception in 2009. “I would much rather put our money into education and diversion — setting a positive path forward for our youth — than into juvenile detention and other services that react to problems.”

The program, funded annually by Kenosha County with the support of the County Board, is modeled after the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Gang Model. The program admits at-risk youth, age 14 to 21, referred by social workers, counselors, teachers and other community stakeholders.

Participants are paid \$7.25 per hour, working 20 hours per week for eight weeks, at participating public- and private-sector worksites.

“This successful public-private partnership is focused on helping at-risk youth learn the skills needed to find and maintain employment, while also learning the intrinsic value of work,” said Ron Rogers, director of the Kenosha County Division of Children and Family Services. “And they do all of this while earning money throughout the summer.”

While the program typically employs more than 200 youth per season, it was smaller in scope this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because of various factors, fewer worksites were

available, and smaller groups of workers were assigned to each to allow for appropriate social distancing. The workers and supervising staff wore face coverings throughout the summer.

Various community partners join with the county to administer the program. The youth workers are officially employees of the Boys & Girls Club of Kenosha. The Kenosha Unified School District and private businesses provide worksites along with Kenosha County Parks, where workers are supervised by staff from Community Impact Programs.

“This represents the county, KUSD, nonprofits and businesses coming together to impact our community in a positive way,” Kreuser said. “I’m proud to see this continuing partnership endure.”

This year in the county parks, youth workers used 22 tons of asphalt to re-edge trails at Petrifying Springs Park, painted playground equipment and signs at several parks, mulched a new playground area at Bristol Woods Park and scraped and painted the wrought iron fence that fronts the Kemper Center grounds.

“This is what I like to do; I like being outside,” said Elijah Charbonneau, a sophomore at LakeView Technology Academy who spent the summer working in Bristol Woods and other parks and is considering a seasonal job working directly for Kenosha County Parks. “As far as I can tell, this is what I’m going to be doing next year.”

Through the Youth Employment in the Arts Program, another Summer Youth Employment partner, some of the youth workers painted a mural, the latest in a series that hang in the hallways of the Kenosha County Job Center, as well as signage for the Boys & Girls Club.

“I think it’s awesome to give kids their first opportunity and to watch them develop over the summer,” said Jake McGhee, CEO of the Boys & Girls Club of Kenosha. “We’re just proud to be a part of it.”

Donna Rhodes, Kenosha County’s gang intervention supervisor, said that in spite of challenges this year related to the pandemic, the hard work and commitment to the program by all of the community partners resulted in a successful program this season.

“We employed 88 young people who got a valuable work experience,” Rhodes said. “They not only learned the hard skills they needed to do the jobs they were assigned to, but they also learned the soft skills that it takes to be successful in the workplace.”

This year’s efforts were celebrated Thursday afternoon, at the unveiling of the new, Kenosha-themed mural in the north corridor of the Job Center.

Citlalli Vera-Ortega, a sophomore at Harborside Academy who was one of the mural’s painters, said the program helped her learn how to communicate with coworkers and to help them solve

problems. She said she used most of the money she earned to reorganize her bedroom and throw a surprise birthday party for her mother.

“To other kids, I would recommend this program,” Vera-Ortega said. “It’s really nice for your first job, to learn how to be on time and how you earn money.”

###