

Lower Begins Mentor Program for Teen Girls

VILLAS- The “Tiger Girls” didn’t growl but they laughed, painted pumpkins, ate dinner together and interacted with new friends and mentors at the Lower Township Recreation Center.

A mentor program known as “Tiger Girls” met for the first time Oct.23. The program was designed to provide a positive after-school experience for seventh and eighth grade girls. It’s a partnership of the Lower Township Department of Parks and Recreation and nine teacher/mentors from the Richard M. Teitelman School.

Sally Yerk, who teaches seventh and eighth grade health and physical education at the Teitelman School, said a workshop was held at Lower Cape May Regional High School last summer that included a visit to the Lower Township Recreation Center. She said it was discovered participation in after-school programs for young girls was lagging.

“They’ll do cheerleading and they’ll do activities but they’re standing outside and on the corner and we wanted to empower our young women to join together and find something in common with each other and take their leadership skills.”

Yerk said plans are in the works for a mentoring group for teen boys.

Jim Ridgway, assistant superintendent of parks and recreation, said several years ago due to budgetary cuts the regional school district’s successful mentor program was eliminated. He said the mentor program built self esteem and encouraged positive choices through teacher-student interaction away from the classroom.

Ridgway said activities for “Tiger Girls” would range from homework help to listening to positive role models from the community explain how they became successful.

“We’re able to give them a game room, a meeting room, an exercise room and use of the gymnasium where they will be doing a multitude of activities once a month in an organized setting,” he said.

Future “Tiger Girls” events will include field trips and visits from experts in fields ranging from hair styling, fashion and healthy eating.

All the mentors are volunteering their time for the program. The mentors are: Sally Yerk, Shelly Vogeley, Tami Kern, Anna Shustack, Heather Shagren, Shannon Bucco, Susan Noble, Mary Frances Batten and Ashley Vogeley.

Ridgway said he and Mitch Plenn, superintendent of Lower Township Department of Park and Recreation, were very excited about the mentor program which has the support of Mayor Michael Beck and Township Manager Mike Voll.

Voll thanked the township’s recreation department and teachers from the Teitelman School serving as mentors for guiding the young women to become productive adults.

“No sponsorship donation is too small for this program,” said Ridgway, noting a need for T-shirts, craft items and food.

Stephen Del Monte of Delmo Sports, a sponsor of the program, said he supported anything the community can do to support its young men and women. Crest Savings Bank is also sponsoring “Tiger Girls.”

For more information on the program, call 204-0275 or email: vogeleis@lcmrschools.com