

Community News

A shared vision becomes a reality

By DAVID PIERCE
Times Staff

A community's richest resource is its people and the children its future. Although many realize this, a lot stop short of making an investment.

Not Peter Underwood nor Brian Holthouse.

Both share a vision of improving education in the area and opening doors and creating opportunities which might not be available to these children otherwise.

Churches, companies, organizations, teachers, businessmen and women have banded together to create "Reach for Tomorrow, Powered by Ritter." The after-school tutoring program kicked off Monday servicing 22 students grades 3-12 from the Osceola School District.

"There are students here who need help," said Holthouse, a native of Osceola who has returned to his hometown after stays in Colorado and Maryland, "and we've established this program to help them get caught up."

Although Holthouse may be a novice when it comes to being a Supplemental Educational Services (SES) provider, Underwood is not.

Founded in 1993, Underwood's Reach for Tomorrow, a non-profit organization, targets students in its mission to improve the three A's of education — attitude, attendance and achievement.

Underwood, needing a



"Reach for Tomorrow, Powered by Ritter"— Ritter Communications is one of many businesses which has jumped on board the community's newest after-school tutoring program. Ritter provided Internet service for the facility which is housed at the Osceola First United Methodist Church where Bro. Allen Rainey (left) is pastor. He is pictured with Melissa Dukes, Ritter Communications, cable business account representative, Dana Boyd, Ritter Communications marketing manager, and Brian Holthouse, the program advocate.

local advocate for his program, was linked with Holthouse and both foresee this after-school tutoring program reaching out to hundreds, maybe thousands of students.

Of course, with those aspirations come equipment needs, software, facilities, instructors, but those haven't proven to be too much of an obstacle for the Underwood-Holthouse team.

The pair have been beating down doors and pounding the pavement to garner the support they need to get this program off the ground.

And it's proved successful as the after-school pro-

gram began its 2-hour, 4-day per week service this week at the Osceola United Methodist Church.

"We were asked to provide some space for the program," said Pastor Allen Rainey, "and it's a way we can help service the kids in the area."

Computers were donated by the National Cristina Foundation, discounted software was received from the Microsoft Foundation and Internet service provided by Ritter Communications, which was anxious to become part of this project.

"Our goal for 2008 is to become more involved in the area we serve,"

explained Dana Boyd, Ritter Communications marketing manager. "It's our 'Right by You' strategy. After hearing from (Peter), we immediately jumped on board. We're eager to help and do everything we can to help this program succeed."

That's the commitment Underwood and Holthouse are looking for and receiving from a cross-section of people, businesses in the community.

"This is truly a community effort," said Holthouse who mentioned the program has received donations from electrician Richard Ford, technical support from John Horton,



Community backing — Richard Ford (center) lent his support to the tutoring lab by donating time and labor to the computer setup. Ford, pictured with Bro. Allen Rainey and Brian Holthouse is one of many community supporters.

and Delois Allen, of the Grace and Mercy Mission, will provide transportation. It doesn't end there with Wal-Mart, State Farm Insurance and others lending their support as well.

The 14-week program, which will be headed by Osceola High School teacher Kathy Gore, is designed to tailor to a student's needs, identify gaps in learning, "and help fill in those gaps," said Holthouse, who has plans relocate the program to the old Fruit of the Loom building when growth warrants it.

"Kids learn differently," said Rick Newell, a retired educator and administrator from Aurora, Colo. and proponent of Underwood's educational program. "We identify how a child learns best and the program is customized to fit them."

Newell has seen this program work, reporting seeing gains of three grade levels from struggling students at an alternative high school started in Aurora.

With the state-of-the-art computer-based programming, parents can track progress and "we're excited about it," said Holthouse almost promising dramatic gains in a student's learning ability. "We want to show parents their child's potential."

The program offers incentives based on points a student accumulates for progress, behavior and community service.

"We're encompassing more than just the education," said Holthouse, "and I think it's critical to provide rewards for children. It might inspire them to go beyond just learning, maybe they will excel."

Re-elect Osceola District Judge Mike Gibson



Personal

- District Judge since 2001
- Former City Attorney of Osceola, Luxora, Bassett & Wilson
- Former Prosecuting Attorney
- U.S. Military Veteran
- Married to wife Marsha for 41 years
- Graduate of Arkansas State University
- Graduate of the University of Arkansas Law School
- Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Arkansas State University
- Board Member Mississippi County Farm Bureau

Record

- More than 36 Years of Practicing Law
- Former member of the Arkansas Board of Pardons and Paroles
- Former Special Associate Justice Arkansas