

Osceola groups win share of \$700,000 in grants from Disney

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Four non-profit organizations that serve Osceola County will be spreading a little magic with the help of Disney's Helping Kids Shine grants.

Disney announced the recipients of its 2006 grants March 28 in front of the Cinderella Castle at Magic Kingdom. The Osceola County Council on Aging received the largest award in the county - \$20,000.

"It was absolutely thrilling to see that they looked at the hard work we've done," said Lisa Wright, volunteer service director with the council. "It was very gratifying to receive such a large award."

The council will use its grant to help fund two programs, the Buddy's Program and Kid's Companion.

Wright said the Buddy's Program is geared toward clients of the Council's adult daycare center. They have mentors and companions from the St. Cloud High School exceptional student education program as well as visits from children at the St. Cloud preschool.

"It's a fun thing for the different generations and children from varying abilities to all come together," Wright said.

Kid's Companion is another inter-generational program that partners senior mentors with at-risk youth at Kissimmee Elementary School. The children involved may have poor attendance, poor grades, behavioral, socialization or even language problems.

The seniors meet with their child once a week to encourage them, be a friend and to provide reliable adult companionship. Wright said the program has operated for the past six



Walt Disney World Photo

Walt Disney World Co. awarded more than \$700,000 in grants to 38 Central Florida non-profit organizations. Some of the representatives of Osceola County organizations that won grants from Disney, shown left to right, are: Susan Crutchfield, Community Vision; Lisa Wright, Osceola County Council on Aging; Kevin Griffin, The Transition House; Cindy Moher, Neptune Middle School; and Morgan Hower, Orange/Osceola CountyCenter for Drug Free Living.

months in their grades, attendance and attitude," Wright said.

The Council on Aging has received funding from the Disney grant program in the past and this year's grant will allow it to expand services to youth, she said.

The funds will be used during the next school term.

Neptune Middle School's Students Mentoring Instructing Learning Evaluating and Servicing received an

person who wrote the grant proposal, said without the support of Disney the school, known for its community service involvement, would not be able to do its projects.

"This (Disney grant) allows us to continue our community service projects," she said. "They (Disney) are a very generous organization."

The school has nine teams of students from grades six through eight that select a service-learning goal

and parents in creating cards.

The funds will be used next school year, Mohen said.

Mohen also said the teams have to write a proposal on how the grant will be spent for the service project before they can receive a portion of the grant.

A youth leadership council comprised of approximately 20 students from grades six through eight will read the students' proposals and see

projects have to be learning-based and give teachers the opportunity to help students come up with creative projects.

Last year, Mohen said, the school received a \$5,000 grant. She also said the school has received approximately \$75,000 in the last 10 years from various grant agencies to help fund its community service mission.

Other groups receiving grants in the county and the grant amounts were: Community Vision, \$10,400; and the Transition House, \$3,500.

In total, Walt Disney World Co. awarded more than \$700,000 in grants to 38 Central Florida non-profit organizations whose efforts build better futures for children, connecting with adults, foster constructive use of free time and develop character and compassion.

"It is a privilege for Walt Disney World to support our community organizations that demonstrate such a deep dedication to improving the lives of children in Central Florida," said Diane Ledder, director of Community Relations for the company.

Each year, Disney mails grant applications to nonprofits throughout Central Florida. This year, the company received 167 applications. A panel of judges comprised of community leaders and Disney cast members chose the grant recipients.

Formerly known as the Community Service Awards, the company renamed the program in 2002 to reflect the company's community focus. Since 1972, Walt Disney World has awarded more than \$8 million to benefit local nonprofits.

In 2005 alone, the company donated \$23.2 million in cash and in-kind support to the community and cast members volunteered more than 203,198 hours to local nonprofits.