

**CONTRA COSTA TIMES**

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Posted on Fri, Jan. 26, 2007

## **Kiwanis Club marks 50 years in San Ramon Valley**

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David Stegman must have driven past the Lucille Mauzy School on Miranda Avenue in Alamo dozens of times before he stepped inside its gates. When he finally did, as part of a Kiwanis Club of San Ramon Valley volunteer project, the experience changed his life. There, he met Danny, a little boy who had been strangled by his clothes in his crib and suffered severe brain damage.

"He couldn't communicate, but it was amazing," recalled Stegman. "You just look at that school, and you say, 'How can the parents do this 24-hours-a-day commitment?' And the courage of Danny to live for 12 years after being strangled. That kid had a big heart and was very tenacious and wanted to live."

For 50 years, the Kiwanis Club of the San Ramon Valley has been bringing together people like Stegman with the groups and people around the valley who need help.

As the club celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, Stegman and others hope that the group's long list of accomplishments and the camaraderie of its members will attract more members.

"As an individual, I need a strong family, a good job and a community outlet to be happy," said Stegman.

"If I didn't have one of those, I wouldn't be a whole person."

The Kiwanis Club of San Ramon Valley has about 50 members who follow the same principle.

Though the total amount the group has donated in its five decades is unclear, fundraising committee chairman David Romano estimates it has donated more than \$1 million to area nonprofit organizations and volunteered for 10,000 community service hours since its founding in 1956.

In the past five years, the group has given grants of more than \$185,000, provided \$98,000 in community service projects and donated about 1,200 hours of community service.

To celebrate its anniversary, the group is planning a private event in February to which it has invited all past presidents to come and speak about their experiences.

Aside from sponsoring the locally renowned Danville Fourth of July Parade, the club is an opportunity to meet people doing good in the community and become one of them.

"We're like a bunch of 9-year-old kids who get to go to lunch every week and just have fun," Stegman said.

"The camaraderie is contagious. But service has always been at the forefront. Even though we're an upper-middle class community, there are still a lot of hardships."

The groups that benefit from the club's largesse say they feel lucky that the club is around. The club's motto, "Serving the Children of the World," means it does a lot of work with public schools and children's nonprofit groups.

"Their efforts over the time I've seen them have mad the community a better place to live," said Larry Sly, executive director of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano. The Kiwanis Club participates every year in the Kiwanis/NBC11 Turkey and Food Drive that brings turkeys to the food bank before Thanksgiving.

"Everything from schools to nonprofits to cultural groups have benefited from what they've done."

The Danville-based Down Syndrome Connection is one of those groups.

Most recently, the Kiwanis Club paid for the group to hold a summer drama class that taught about a dozen teens how to have safe interactions, how to have friends and other important topics.

"For us (the Kiwanis club) has definitely been a blessing," said Executive Director Teresa Basa. "They've sustained our summer program for quite a few years."

For his part, Stegman, who is the club's veteran member after joining in 1971, said the most remarkable thing about

the club is how stable it has been as the valley has grown.

"In 1971, you're talking about a small town, no cities," he said. "The community has exploded with growth and the number of people and social needs have grown tremendously.

"But the values of the club and the types of work we've done are the same as when I first joined. I think our club has withstood all those years and kept its own vitality."

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