

2009-2010 RI Significant Achievement Award

Project Description

To establish a long-term partnership with an at-risk community within which the members of the Rotary Club of Denver Mile High could make a difference.

The majority of the members of the Rotary Club of Denver Mile High commute to Denver from surrounding communities. With the expectation that serving a shared community would involve and retain more members, the club sought out and agreed to partner with an at-risk Denver neighborhood known as Villa Park.

Denver Mile High has made a long term commitment to Villa Park with the overall objective to support and encourage residents to graduate from high school

In the beginning, the most important task was to establish relationship with the Villa Park Neighborhood Association (VPNA), Denver Public Schools (DPS), teachers, parents and care-givers, and students. This was accomplished by working hand-in-hand in the neighborhood on projects of their choice and design.

- Teach Junior Achievement in Eagleton Elementary School
- Attend VPNA monthly meetings
- Established and now collaborate on a Villa Park Neighborhood Family Holiday Party which rotates between three elementary schools
- Gave "Adventures of Simon and Barklee" books as speakers' gift to Eagleton and Cowell Elementary Schools.
- Teach and support English classes for adult residents
- Enjoy Friday morning English conversations with residents
- Provide guidance to parents to help their children complete homework
- Sponsor GED classes at Emily Griffith Opportunity School
- Introduced and establish BrainWise® Program which teaches students and parents how to stop and think to make wise choices.
- Provide a literacy and numeracy climbing wall
- Hold club meetings at Eagleton Elementary
- Provide puppet instruction and hand-made puppets to be reading buddies to second-graders.
- Present Rotary GSE China trip to students
- Hosted RI President Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar at Eagleton Elementary
- Sponsor Villa Park residents to participate in Denver Mile High projects including gleaning and Young-RYLA.
- Collaborate with VPNA to establish a 9Health Fair in Villa Park

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Project Justification

Villa Park is an impoverished neighborhood in West Denver where the two Denver Public Elementary schools offer free breakfast and free lunch to all students. The population is 92% Latino with immigrant and 2nd and 3rd generation residents. About 50% of the residents own their own homes. Students from Villa Park migrate to Richel and Lake middle schools and then to West high school. The Piton Foundation has reported the graduation rate of students living in Villa Park at 13.3%.

In 2003, when Denver Mile High first started working with the schools in Villa Park, Rotary was better known in remote islands of the Philippines than it was in this neighborhood. The neighborhood, located in a pocket surrounded by four major traffic arteries which pen the residents in, is usually overlooked by government and organizations whose interventions have boundaries outside of Villa Park. As a result, the first question asked by the VPNA was "And how long will Rotary be around?" Our response was "Let's work together for 10 years and then take it from there." To build the mutual respect and trust in Villa Park that Rotary enjoys in most of the free world, we have developed programs for parents that augment our programs for their children. Wanting to make a difference, Denver Mile High has made available a wide array of diverse opportunities to touch the lives of the residents.

Erica Ramlow, principal of Eagleton Elementary, selected Rotary rather than a corporate community partner offered by the Denver Public Schools Foundation. She says, "Rotary offers the children at Eagleton, whose world boundaries are mostly constricted to Villa Park, a diversity of professionals who are service oriented and have proven to be effective role models."

Today, Villa Park teachers, parents, students, and local representatives of the Denver city council and school board know Rotary as a trusted resource and regularly collaborate with us on projects they identify as making a difference to their neighborhood.

Having a local community focus has also helped Denver Mile High's membership. 98% of Denver Mile High members have participated in the Villa Park projects and we have involved Rotarians belonging to Denver Sky High, Denver Cherry Creek, Lakewood Foothills, and Evergreen Rotary clubs, as well as Interactors from North High School and Rotaractors from the Denver Metro Club.

It takes a community to build a Rotary Club and it takes a Rotary Club to build a community.

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SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Denver Mile High Rotary's long term commitment to community service in Villa Park

In August 2005, through a strategic planning process, club members identified a major difference between Denver Mile High and successful non-urban Rotary Clubs – we do not all live in the same community. We agreed to identify a community where we could organize and maximize our local community service efforts, become a valuable and recognized contributor to that community, and to enjoy the benefits of achieving such status. We chose Villa Park, an impoverished neighborhood in West Denver, where 86.6% of students qualify for free school lunch and breakfast, and only 13.3% of the residents entering 9th grade graduate from high school.

Making a difference in a community presents a wide array of diverse, yet integrated, opportunities for local community service. In Villa Park, Denver Mile High works with the community to provide literacy, health, hunger, and vocational service. Most of all, the club is building relationships of respect and trust that Rotary enjoys throughout the world but that did not exist in our chosen community, Villa Park.

While growth cannot be attributed to a single change in strategy, Denver Mile High membership has grown from 64 to 84 since the Villa Park program began. Nearly 100% of Denver Mile High Rotarians have been or are involved in one or more Villa Park projects. We have also recruited Rotarian volunteers from Rotary Clubs of Evergreen, Lakewood Foothills, Denver LoDo, Sky High, and Cherry Creek as well as Rotactors, Interactors, and RYLarians.

Denver Public Schools (DPS)

Villa Park is the home of two public elementary schools, Eagleton and Cowell, and one parochial school, Presentation of our Lady. Denver Mile High has formed relationships with administration, teachers and students at all three schools. The club also enjoys collaboration and cooperation from the central administration of DPS. On International Literacy Day, our speaker Allegra Haynes, DPS Community Coordinator, reported on the initiatives of Denver Public Schools and commended our BrainWise pilot study in Villa Park – calling it a “seed” that she would like to see blossom throughout Denver Public Schools. To celebrate March Literacy Month, our speaker is Lieutenant Governor Barbara O’Brien who will report on Colorado’s Race to the Top in Education.

The Villa Park Neighborhood Association (VPNA)

To know residents and to build a bridge of trust, a member of Denver Mile High Rotary joined the VPNA and regularly attends meetings. VPNA members join Rotary in teaching Junior Achievement, participate in the annual VPNA Family Holiday Party with planning, fund raising and attendance, and co-chair the annual Villa Park Neighborhood 9Health Fair. The Denver City Council member representing Villa Park regularly attends the Family Holiday Party and Health Fair.

The following projects are shown in order of sequence wherever possible.

Denver Mile High Rotary Partners with Junior Achievement

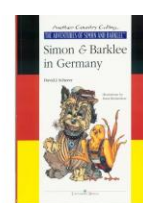
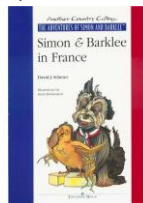
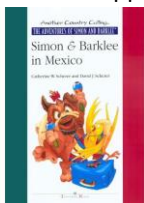
Vocational Service: Every year since 2004 Denver Mile High members have partnered with Junior Achievement to help elementary school students in Villa Park relate education to the workplace. Junior Achievement’s elementary school programs begin in kindergarten and continue through fifth grade and include Ourselves*, Our Families*, Our Community*, Our City*, Our Region*, Our Nation*, and JA Dollars and Sense™

Rotarian and Second Graders at Eagleton Elementary School delight in having learned about how a community works.



Speakers Gifts support Literacy, the Villa Park Culture, and Rotary

Literacy: From 2005-9, Denver Mile High presented speakers with a Simon and Barklee adventure series book which they signed for the students at Eagleton and Cowell Elementary schools. Written by Rtn. Catherine Scherer, the books support literacy, global citizenship, travel, adventure, reading, social studies math and the arts



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Annual Villa Park Neighborhood Family Holiday Party since 2005

Rotarians partner with Villa Park Neighborhood Association and Denver Public Schools

Building relationships and trust: Upon learning of our interest in the Villa Park Neighborhood, Eagleton's principal, Erica Ramlow introduced us to the community leaders at the Villa Park Neighborhood Association (VPNA). In early November, 2005, Rosa Howard, VPNA president, mentioned that it was her dream to have a neighborhood family holiday party. Denver Mile High Rotary went to work to make her dream come true. The 2005 party at Eagleton Elementary School attracted about 450 residents. Annually thereafter the party rotated among the three neighborhood elementary schools and soon doubled in size. The 2009 party attracted 385 adults and 552 children. 82 Rotarians, Rotaractors and Interactors helped children select books, including a Spanish/English dictionary; make crafts; serve food and beverages; photograph families with Santa; and enjoy Caroline the Clown.

Every child received a book and signed a nameplate to make it their own



Children made over 2000 crafts



Enjoyed Caroline the Clown



Caroled Holiday Tunes



Families were photographed with Santa



Enjoyed the Pot Luck Dishes



And made Rotarians and their families very happy!



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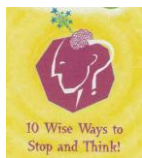
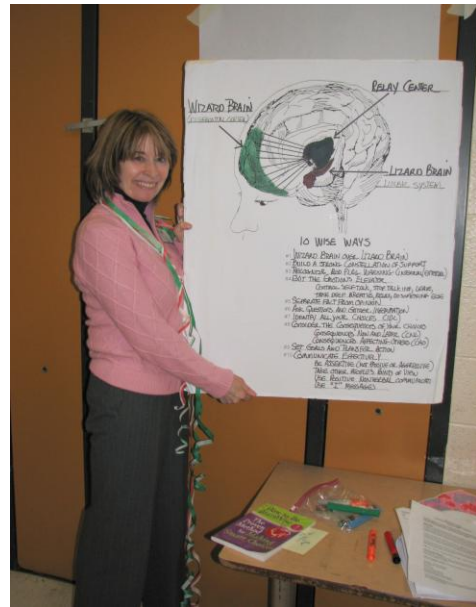
Denver Mile High Rotarians provide financial and volunteer support for Villa Park parents to learn English

Literacy and Education: In early 2006, Denver Mile High provided a \$2,000 grant and six Rotarians volunteered to support an ESL program for the parents of Eagleton students. The grant funded the Eagleton ESL teachers from January-May, then paid for child care for the following three school years in support of a professionally run ESL program that meets every Monday and Wednesday morning.

Denver Mile High Partners with BrainWise®

Literacy and Education: Many of the families in Villa Park have minimal education, language barriers, low pay or unemployment, may struggle with health issues and often lack the ability to utilize and benefit from the services available to them. Denver Mile High partnered with BrainWise, a nonprofit organization, to provide an evidence-based program to teach individuals about the brain and how to use thinking skills to make wise choices. Initially a BrainWise resource teacher worked two days a week with the school's faculty. Students learned the BrainWise curriculum during the school day at Eagleton Elementary. After school, Rotarians taught parents to apply BrainWise thinking skills to decisions about finances, school, family problems, and work. The project involved hundreds of hours of work by Rotarians and served more than 300 children and their families.

Rotarian and parents listen attentively as Rtn. Dr. Pat (developer of BrainWise) explains the wisdom of using your Wizard Brain over your Lizard Brain. The classes taught them how to integrate BrainWise concepts into stories, current events, and day-to-day situations.



During the after school program the following year, a bilingual BrainWise instructor taught Spanish speaking families and Rotarians taught the same classes in English. The success of this program led to offshoot programs requested by the parents. Rotarians reinforced BrainWise thinking skills, called the 10 Wise Ways, while conducting English conversation classes and helping parents tutor their children in reading and math. Rotarians also integrated the 10 Wise Ways into classes on money and banking.



With the success of the program, Eagleton expanded BrainWise to the entire student body and school staff. The school's faculty and staff received BrainWise training, and a BrainWise Resource teacher assisted teachers two days a week. To support this opportunity, Spanish-speaking, BrainWise-trained, high school students helped Rotarians tutor students and teachers to facilitate BrainWise inside and outside the classrooms.

To attract parents and students to participate in BrainWise after school family sessions Denver Mile High Rotary provides food and young child care

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Denver Mile High Rotarians teach “Be BrainWise with Money” to Villa Park residents

Financial Literacy: Denver Mile High and Denver LoDo Rotarians integrated the BrainWise program's thinking skills, called the 10 Wise Ways, into the FDIC's MoneySmart bilingual financial curriculum. The course teaches people about basic banking concepts, letting them know how to avoid paying hefty check cashing fees, informing them of their rights as bank customers, and demonstrating how to set up savings accounts for themselves and their children. As Rotarians taught parents about credit and banking services,



they also taught them about the brain and how to use the 10 Wise Ways to make responsible financial choices and decisions. The program was funded by United Western Bank and taught at Our Lady of Presentation School. Denver Mile High Rotarians repeated the course at Eagleton Elementary School, teaching several finance classes to parents in English and Spanish as part of the after school BrainWise family sessions.

Be BrainWise with Money Essay Contest

In 2009, sixty Eagleton fifth graders entered a contest and wrote essays on how they would use the 10 Wise Ways to be BrainWise with Money. Denver Mile High Rotarians judged the essays, and a “celebrity judge,” Terrance Carroll, Speaker of the Colorado House of Representatives, selected winners from the finalists. The top prize was \$100, two second prize winners won \$50 each, and the two third place winners won \$25 each. Denver Mile High Rotarians recognized the winners at an end-of-school ceremony. Rotarians presented the winning contestants with checks and a framed certificate that recognized their effort.



Funding of the Rotary/BrainWise Program in Villa Park

The Rotary/BrainWise collaboration was made possible by funding from the Rotary Club of Denver Mile High foundation, generous contributions and in-kind services from Rotary club members, and grants awarded the BrainWise nonprofit organization by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Donnell-Kay Foundation, United Western Bank, and The Daniels Fund.

Recognition of the Rotary/BrainWise Program in Villa Park

- 2006 Denver Mile High Rotarians and Eagleton parents presented the BrainWise Program in Villa Park to Rotary leaders at the Rotary Zones 25-26 Institute held in Denver
- 2007 The BrainWise program received Rotary International Innovative Literacy Project Award, recognizing that “The BrainWise project has changed the Rotary world’s vision regarding the scope of school partnership project and the standards used to measure success.”
- 2006-2007 Articles published in Rotary International North American Literacy Newsletter
- *BrainWise-Teaching Critical Thinking Skills*, July, 2006
- *BrainWise-Linking Critical Thinking with Literacy*, August, 2006
- *BrainWise in Denver, Rotary Literacy Intervention Expands*, October 2007
- Selected for publication in *Every School A Star*
- Selected for publication in *Rotary Reads*
- The BrainWise program held a break-out workshop at Rotary International Conventions in Salt Lake City and Birmingham and was a featured literacy project by the Rotary International Literacy Resource Group in the House of Friendship at RI Conventions in Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, Birmingham, and Montreal.

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Denver Mile High Rotarians enjoy English conversations with Villa Park parents

Literacy and Education: Parents learning BrainWise and taking English as a second language (ESL) class on Monday and Wednesday noted that they do not have a chance to practice their English. As a result of the trust built with the BrainWise classes, parents used their new thinking skills to ask Rotarians to meet with them at Eagleton Elementary School on Friday mornings from 9 to 10am to practice using their thinking skills in English conversations.

Denver Mile High Rotarians mentor Villa Park parents to help their children with homework.

Literacy and Education: The BrainWise training and ESL conversations led parents to request that Rotarians help them to help their children with their homework. Rotarians agreed and met with students and their parents for an hour before each BrainWise class.

Denver Mile High provides Eagleton a Literacy and Numeracy Climbing Wall

Literacy and Numeracy: In 2007 with the assistance of a District Simplified Grant, Denver Mile High installed a horizontal climbing wall which starts a few inches from the floor, is approximately eight feet high and extends along the wall of the Eagleton gymnasium for 32 feet. The wall is magnetic and includes 36 dry eraser plates that teachers place at strategic spots on the wall. The wall provides an interesting, fun and inviting learning environment for students at Eagleton. Teachers write spelling, reading or mathematical problems on the plates. The student is expected to solve the problem during the course of traversing along the wall on a designated climbing route. Climbing on the wall also provides a physical component which contributes to the physical education of the Eagleton students.

The wall has engendered school pride and the students love it.



The dedication ceremony was attended by 50 Rotarians including DSG writer Dan Himelspach, Denver Mile High President Marion Leggett, and District Governor David Beall.

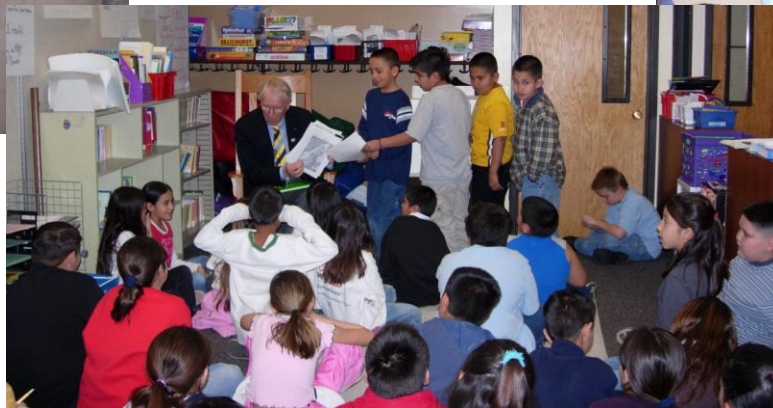
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Hand Puppet Reading Buddies

Literacy: Upon learning about Denver Mile High's literacy programs in Villa Park, puppeteer Kate O'Kane donated 50 handmade hand-puppets to be used as student reading buddies. Rotarians then arranged for storytellers to come to the school to teach the students about puppeteering and how to read to their puppets. The puppets belong to Eagleton Elementary and are circulated among the second-grade classrooms each year.



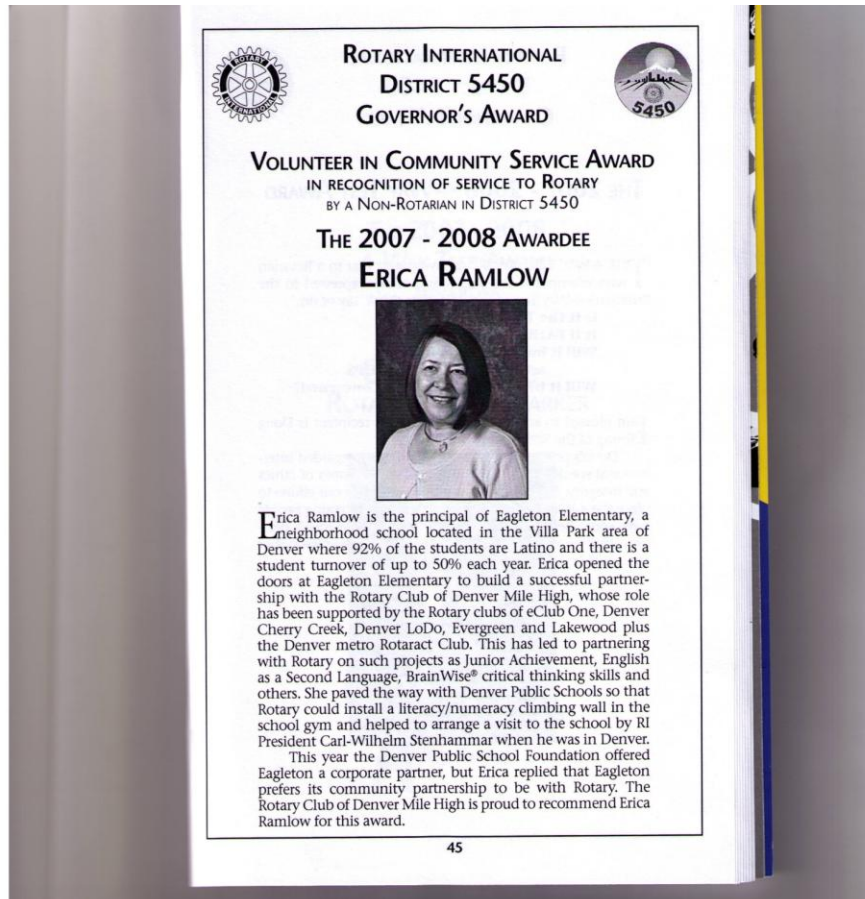
Denver Mile High and Eagleton Elementary host a very important visitor
Rotary International President Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar toured Eagleton Elementary and enjoyed reading to fourth grade students who presented him their research about Rotary and Sweden.



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Egleton Elementary and Denver Mile High Rotary – a true school partnership

Erica Ramlow, Principal of Egleton Elementary, who successfully built an innovative school and community partnership with Rotary which nurtures parental involvement and student achievement, received the District Governor's Volunteer in Community Service Award given to a non-Rotarian who has supported the work of Rotary.



Denver Mile High Rotarians support Cowell Elementary in Villa Park

Literacy and Education: In Mexico, parents visit a school only when their children are in trouble. The teachers at Cowell Elementary decided to donate several Saturday mornings to call on the parents in their homes. Denver Mile High Rotarians provided a grant of \$2,500 to buy age appropriate books for the teachers of Cowell Elementary to bring as house gifts when they called on the parents in their homes.

Hunger: DMH donated \$250.00 for the Food for Learning program to support the free and reduced lunch and breakfast program at Cowell Elementary School.

Relationship building: The Villa Park Neighborhood Family Holiday Party is held every third year at Cowell. Every year Cowell parents participate in planning the party, decorating the schools, and bringing delicious pot luck dishes of their family holiday traditions.

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Denver Mile High Rotarians sponsor an annual 9Health Fair in Villa Park

Health: In 2007 Upon learning that St. Anthony's hospital planned to close its facility on Colfax Avenue, Denver Mile High and the Villa Park Neighborhood Association signed up to bring a 9Health Fair to Villa Park's residents. Held at the Presentation of Our Lady School Gymnasium, the 9Health Fair provides yet another opportunity to provide needed services while building relationship with the Villa Park Neighborhood Association and the residents of Villa Park. The health fair is now an annual event in which thirty Rotarians volunteer and features a BrainWise advice table to help residents reduce stress and manage their mental health.



Denver Mile High enjoys including the residents of Villa Park in Rotary projects.



Villa Park residents participate in Denver Mile High's day of Gleaning for the COMPA Food Ministry.



Villa Park families are very close and guarded. It took five years of building trust for a parent to be willing to allow their child to attend Young-RYLA.

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Continuation of the successful programs enjoyed by both Rotarians and Villa Park...and...
- Four-Way Test program for 5th graders to focus on the importance of high school graduation
 - District 5450's program to prevent childhood obesity
 - Shots for Tots immunization program for the children of Villa Park.
 - Micro-Credit program to help Villa Park residents start small businesses.
 - Community Leadership Training to create sustainability