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Leaving the City and Seeing the Stars

Davin Reddington, Laura Dow, and Chris Widmaier believe that living in an urban community should not deprive kids of experiencing the great outdoors. In spare time from their roles as teachers in the Wilson Magnet Commencement Academy, they advise the Wilson Outdoor Club, which has earned them the Healthy Hero award from Greater Rochester Health Foundation.

The nine-month program they developed involves bi-weekly meetings and monthly activities that are fun, educational, and sufficiently active to get the heart rates of participants racing. Over 100 students participated in academic year 2008-2009. Activities included orienteering, skiing, neighborhood walks, sledding, and hiking. Healthy eating also is an important component of the program. The academic year ended with 30 students going to Camp Pathfinder in Algonquin Park on a five-day camping trip.

“We wanted students to go outside and have fun. The Outdoor Club has grown beyond our expectations. The community we have built, the relationships between students, staff and families, along with the support of organizations outside of the school, have shown us that we found a niche that needed to be filled,” the three teachers say. They cited one student’s fascination at seeing stars clearly for the first time and how many students returned home with new self-confidence.

John Urban, president and CEO of Greater Rochester Health Foundation, praises the initiative of Reddington, Dow and Widmaier. “They started with three reluctant students and volunteered their time weekdays and weekends to show them a new world outside of the city limits. Most of the kids had not had an opportunity to participate in outdoor activities of this nature due to both opportunity and cost. These three dynamic teachers removed those barriers.”

GRHF wants to recognize people who are helping kids stay healthy. These are individuals or groups that have gone above and beyond their normal duties to successfully impact children's nutrition and/or physical activity. Healthy Heroes are awarded $500 that is to be donated to the organization of their choice in the spirit of improving the health of children through increased physical activity and improved nutrition. People interested in nominating Healthy Heroes may visit www.beahealthyhero.org.