

The Many Advantages of the CCS

By Kim Weidman

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Police officers helping with homework, trained computer specialists giving adults technical tips, and Pop Warner football players practicing their punting – these groups may seem to have little in common, but they all rely on one group: The Chelsea Community Schools (CCS).

CCS is a six-year-old program the community started to provide resources and space for culture, recreation and educational opportunities beyond the hours of the school days and already facilitates programs that 450 adults and children participate in.

With a new director and a new vision, CCS is hoping to expand its offerings and reach even more residents.

“It’s a little hidden secret, a little gem,” CCS’s new director, Bea Cravatta, says. Only a few weeks into her role, Cravatta says she has been amazed by how many people the program reaches, all through word-of-mouth.

CCS uses the Williams Middle School as a multi-purpose center where various teams, classes, and groups meet everyday, from 4 to 8 p.m. during the week, on Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and on Sunday throughout the day.

Cravatta, who has a background in clinical social work and worked with children’s programs, says she has been very impressed by Chelsea in the weeks she has been here and has big plans for the program.

“There’s so much potential,” Cravatta says. “It’s been a very welcoming community.” As Cravatta gets her feet wet, she plans to expand CCS’ offerings, focusing on programs that enhance positive attitudes, reduce youth and domestic violence, and explore employment opportunities. Ideally, Cravatta says, CCS will become a center of activities for the benefit of the entire population.

City Manager Jay Ash says Chelsea’s youth are one of the city’s top priorities, and the city fully supports CCS’ goal of growing and adding more services.

“Even in these difficult financial times ... we believe in offering the kinds of programs that Chelsea Community Schools offers of value to our residents,” Ash says.

He adds that he has a great deal of confidence in CCS’ staff. “Bea brings a great deal of energy and vision to the program itself,” he said.

Cravatta, in turn, says that much of CCS’ success is owed to Ivette Ithier, on-site manager who coordinates CCS’ many programs and makes sure each group or class has what it needs. For the past six months, when CCS was between directors, Ithier kept things going during the transition.

“It’s Ivette who has been holding this together,” Cravatta says.

In addition, Cravatta says that were it not for the support of the Chelsea community, this program wouldn’t be possible. CCS receives support from the Chelsea Greenspace and Recreation Committee, the Chelsea Human Services Collaborative, Chelsea Community Connections, Bunker Hill Community College, Centro Latino, ROCA, LACA, the Chelsea Police Department, local churches, and mothers and fathers.

And the adults who lead many of the classes and programs often do so without compensation, Cravatta adds, taking time away from their jobs and families to volunteer weekly.

“The most impressive part of the week since I’ve been here is the amount of volunteers. Their not in it for the money,” Cravatta says.

“We want to work to be able to have such a good system and a streamlined system that we can be able to expand,” Cravatta says.

And in Chelsea, where people of all races, backgrounds and walks of life have myriad skills and insight to offer, Cravatta thinks the possibilities are endless.

“The community is itself a school,” says Cravatta.