

January 13, 2010

Group for parents of teens moves from Oldham to east Jefferson

By Sara Cunningham
scunningham@courier-journal.com

The new year started with a new home for an Oldham County parent group that has grown from one mother who was frustrated with what she didn't know about her teenagers to hundreds of parents who want to know more about teen culture.

Operation: SPIRIT (Supportive Parents Involved in Raising Incredible Teenagers) moved from its one-room, 400-square-foot headquarters at South Oldham High School to a two-floor, 5,000-square-foot office space off of Middletown Industrial Boulevard in Jefferson County in December.

Work on the new headquarters isn't quite finished yet, but Jean Schumm, an entrepreneur and mother of five who founded the nonprofit organization in 2005 to help herself and other parents, said she hopes the move will expand the group's reach beyond Oldham County.

Schumm, the president, said she wants the organization to be able to help more parents. She hopes to start holding events at the new location in February.

"There really aren't any barriers when you have a good idea and good volunteers," Schumm said. "We're trying to build more awareness in the community so that they know we're here and we have resources for them."

Operation: SPIRIT began offering Parenting 101 classes to parents in 2006. The classes include a video training course and parent handbook and tackle issues like sexually transmitted diseases, eating disorders, drug abuse and online and cell phone safety. Parents also get a chance to ask questions.

"We're also about networking," Schumm said. "So much of our mission is letting parents know that they are not the only ones dealing with these issues. These are universal, life-and-death issues. We can't afford to be naïve enough to think our kids aren't exposed or aren't involved at all."

More than 400 parents in Oldham and the surrounding area have taken the Parenting 101 classes in recent years, Schumm said.

In addition to high schools and middle schools in Oldham, classes are scheduled at Holy Trinity, Sacred Heart Academy, St. Francis in the Fields, Walden School and many other schools. A schedule is on the organization's Web site.

One of the Parenting 101 classes made the organization's new location possible.

Laura Lichtefeld, who has two children at St. Albert the Great, took the class and began volunteering with Operation: SPIRIT in 2008. When the group's need for more space became an issue, she asked her father-in-law, developer Paul Lichtefeld Sr., if he had any office space available. He did and he donated it to the group, Laura Lichtefeld said.

The new location will be rent-free for two years and Operation: SPIRIT just pays for the utilities, Schumm said.

"The classes and the events have been a chance for me to become a better parent and I really feel

like the world needs this program,” Laura Lichteferd said.

The new space has generated a lot of excitement and ideas within the organization, Schumm said.

Schumm said she hopes to start offering classes at businesses that want to give employees a chance to complete the course on their lunch breaks.

“I see it as a ‘Lunch & Learn’ option,” Schumm said. “It could be a lot more convenient for parents to do this on their lunch breaks.”

Operation: SPIRIT also holds speaker events on particular topics and social events where parents and teens can have fun together.

The new location will feature a resource library, a cafe and more space for classes and events, Schumm said. Eventually, the group would like to build a computer lab for parents as well.

Schumm said the changes could help the group further its mission.

“In my mind, I don’t think we have a teen problem,” Schumm said. “I think we have a parenting problem, or maybe we should see it as a parenting opportunity. We’re here to give parents a broader perspective, information, support and encouragement so that they can be better for their kids.”

Reporter Sara Cunningham can be reached at (502) 582-4335.

Additional Facts

MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.operationspirit.org for more information about Operation: SPIRIT.
