

Teacher helps kids S.A.V.E. the world

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COVENTRY — The School Committee gave Charles “Charlie” Blanchette, or “Mr. B,” the Service Learning Recognition Award Tuesday night at their meeting.

A teacher for 15 years in Coventry, he teaches social studies to seventh and eighth grade students at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School. It is his work with Students Against Vandalism Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) that has gained both he and the school notoriety throughout the state.

Started five years ago with a student frustrated at the vandalism she saw at her school, S.A.V.E. is proud to not just be about vandalism. The kids who are a part of S.A.V.E. work both at their school and in the community to fight against vandalism, bullying and other crime.

S.A.V.E. is a part of the Rhode Island Third Eye and the National Youth Crime Watch Project. For the last four years they have been funded by the Learn and Serve America Grant, receiving a total of \$86,000 dollars for projects and equipment.

Blanchette graciously declined being at the school committee meeting Tuesday night to receive his award. One of his students had asked him to come to a karate demonstration. She had told Blanchette he was her hero, he said. “The kids come first,” he said with a smile.

When the kids give him feedback he knows the lessons he is hoping to

share are getting through. When they say things like, “‘I believe in myself more and have more faith in my opinions and am not afraid to speak up,’ that’s huge.” Blanchette said.

The group at the middle school has about 80 kids on the list and about 30 to 40 attend on a regular basis, Blanchette said.

S.A.V.E. now also has groups at the Blackrock, Hopkins Hill and Washington Oak Elementary Schools and also students at the high school.

Recently his group placed 700 flags at the Knotty Oak Cemetery, worked with the Birds of a Feather Grant to paint birdhouses, which were placed outside the school and this Thursday they were working to make a difference in another part of the world.

At a National Youth Leadership Conference Blanchette met Tony Cervone, President of Green Energies, LLC. One of Cervone’s projects is the Taa Bora, Swahili for “better light,” LED light that can be made from a plastic bottle and a small kit provided by Green Energies.

The kids in S.A.V.E. were working Thursday to create a few of these lights or “lanterns.” Working with the Attorney General’s office, they will be sent to Haiti. In February the students did a 50/50 Raffle for Haiti that provided the funds for the materials.



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Megan Palmer, president S.A.V.E at Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School, displays an assembled Taa Bora lanterns that will be sent to Haiti. The lanterns are an LED light that can be made from a plastic bottle and a small kit provided to populations in Third World countries and other crisis areas.



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Students Against Vandalism Everywhere members Tori Defunchio (from left), Kaylyn Pierce, Jamie Trautman, Lisa Thiele and Josh Glynn work with "Mr. B," Charles Blanchette, Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry's seventh and eighth grade social studies teacher, on a Taa Bora lantern to be sent to Haiti.

Teacher awarded for efforts

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“Light means safety,” a lot of the time, Blanchette said, and the lights are also giving women and children throughout the Third World opportunities to go to school at night, he said.

Green Energies travels to teach locals how to make the lights themselves and they can then be sold to bring income directly back into those communities. More about Green Energies, LLC can be found at www.greenenergiesllc.com.

Eighth grader Megan Palmer, who is the president of S.A.V.E at the middle school, is herself one of those students that Blanchette mentioned was affected by her involvement in S.A.V.E. When she joined the group in sixth grade she said

she “wasn’t talkative,” but being in S.A.V.E made her realize she had a voice and “that I can use it” she said.

She said when she was little she had always wanted to “change the world” and “S.A.V.E helped me do that. I am changing my community and the rest of the world,” she said.

While John Cornell is excited about the pool party the group is having in a couple weeks, Mary Mocker said she is glad they “get to help the environment” and both Hannah Barovier and Olivia Williams are in the group to see a positive change in themselves and others. Williams said, “I used to be the one to do vandalism — I’m here to change.” Barovier said she used to be the girl who no one sat with at lunch and that she al-

ways got bullied, but she joined S.A.V.E to know how to stop the bullying.

The group has created bullying tip boxes and also has a phone number set up that can be called at any time to report bullying. The tips are then dealt with immediately by someone at the school.

Blanchette has also worked to create “Team Walls” in the hallways that students from each wing can be a part of. He has seen the kids take ownership of these areas. They say, “This is our wall, this is our hallway. They don’t vandalize these,” Blanchette said.

The S.A.V.E group meets every Thursday at 2:30 p.m. at the middle school and more information can be found by contacting Blanchette or visiting www.stopvandalism.net.