

Dor-wood Optimist and Safety Village celebrate 30 years

The City of Kettering isn't the only one celebrating an anniversary this year. The Dor-Wood Optimist, working with the city, will sponsor Kettering's Safety Village for the 30th year this summer.

Since 1966, pre-kindergartners have been learning the do's and don'ts of traffic and pedestrian safety. The local program was the second Safety Village in the State of Ohio and the first in Southwest Ohio.

"It was well-received by the community," says Joe McCloud, a long-time Dor-Wood member. "We didn't have to go out and approach the schools. We had a general announcement and had sign ups."

Dr. Tom Frazier, a dentist, who passed away just last year, was instrumental in getting the program off the ground.

Each summer, 4- and 5-year-old children have spent a week in the classroom learning all kinds of safety messages — from stranger danger to pedestrian safety. Then they put their new-found knowledge to the test.



A miniature village helps kids practice their safety lessons.

"I remember we'd go out to the back, to this little village," says Beth Cunningham, who was in one of the first few classes. "It was tiny — our size. And we'd follow all the basic rules, and you'd have kids be pedestrians."

The village, built by the Dor-Wood Optimists originally at the former Ernst School, began with a miniature city building, traffic light, school and school zone, grocery, church and service station. The little travelers used — and still today use — all their might to pedal cars around.

To finance the construction of the \$3500 village, the optimists sold plots to Safety Village.

"People could buy one square foot of Safety Village for \$1 and receive an honorary deed," says Jerry Barnett, President of the Dor-Wood Optimist.

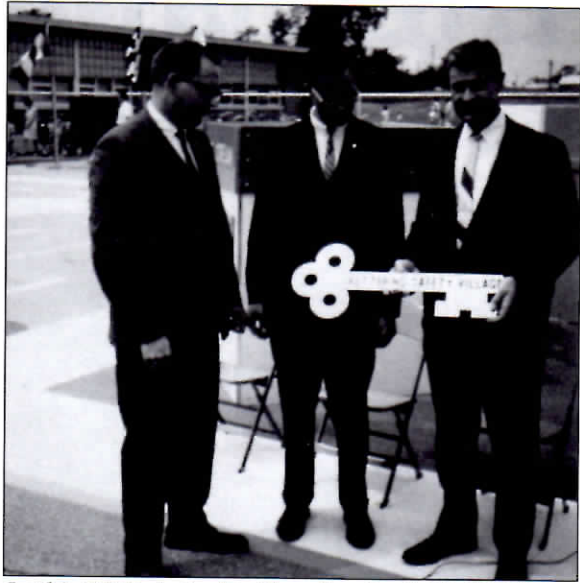
For the first 10 years Dor-Wood Optimist worked with the Kettering Schools to sponsor the village.

"We depended pretty heavily on Miami Valley American Automobile Association (AAA) materials," Barnett says.

About 20 years ago, the Optimists and City of Kettering joined forces to sponsor the program.

Since then, the program has undergone a few changes and additions. One of the first changes was to add a parents' class.

"We teach the parents the same information," says Billie DeBrosse, Safety Coordinator. "That way they



In this 1966 photo, Dr. Tom Frazier (left), 1966 Dor-wood President Corwin Kohls, and Mayor Robert Haverstick, celebrate the opening of Safety Village.

can reinforce the message with their kids at home."

In the late 1970s, the program moved to Orchard Park Elementary School after Ernst was closed.

Over the years the program has expanded to include water safety, animal and fire safety, and school bus safety, just to name a few.

DeBrosse says it's hard to measure the effectiveness of a program that is trying to prevent accidents and injury. But come fall, safety supervisors can tell who went to Safety Village.

"It's very evident the kids who have been through Safety Village," DeBrosse says. "It's easy to tell a child who has been through the program because of the answers they'll give during safety presentations."

After nearly 30 years, Safety Village is beginning to see some familiar faces.

"About one-third of the parents of children in Kettering Safety Village went through it themselves," DeBrosse says.

And with 300 children participating annually, it's still popular.

"We've had kids from as far away as Texas visit grandparents here so they can go to Safety Village," DeBrosse says. "It definitely is a program that has grown up with the community."

Safety Village sign ups under way

Sign ups are under way for the 1995 Safety Village program. All pre-kindergartners are invited to attend whether or not they live in the City of Kettering.

The five-day sessions run for two hours each day. Parents can choose from 12 different sessions

offered at various times of the day between June 12 and July 21.

Only children registered for fall kindergarten can participate in Safety Village. For more information, call Billie DeBrosse at 296-2520.