

Village can help raise a child safely

Kettering program helps ages 4 to 6 avoid dangers

By JOANNE CLODFELTER
For the Dayton Daily News

KETTERING — The Kettering Safety Village, sponsored by the city of Kettering and the Dor-Wood Optimist Club, is celebrating its 40th year of teaching pedestrian and transportation safety to prekindergarten children.

It is the second oldest safety village program in the state.

Sylvia Harlow and Rebecca Schneider have each been teaching kids at the safety village for more than 20 years.



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ERIC RUSTAD, community relations officer for the Kettering Police Department, teaches children in the Kettering Safety Village how to safely cross a street.

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SAFETY

Kettering program teaches 4- to 6-year-olds

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Teenage volunteers sit at each table to help coordinate the activities.

"What was that big word we learned yesterday?" Harlow asked the group on a recent morning.

"Pedestrian!" replied the chorus of 4- to 6-year-olds.

"What's the most important thing you should do before you cross a street?"

"Look both ways!" came the reply.

Mark Rasor, senior safety supervisor for the city of Kettering, has been in charge of the safety village for three years.

"For some children, this is their first exposure to an organized process," Rasor said. "It breaks down the fear factor for when they get to kindergarten. They learn to sit at a table with other kids."

"We cover a multitude of safety topics," Rasor said. "We teach the kids transportation safety and awareness, what to do if your house is on fire and stranger danger."

Presenters include uniformed members of the Kettering fire and police departments, so the participants learn to feel comfortable around public safety officials.

Kids attend class inside the school, and also go outside to the child-size village to learn to safely cross streets while other kids zoom around in miniature, pedal-powered cars.

Other activities include taking a ride on a school bus, learning about good and bad animals, a puppet show about fire safety, and walking on streets with and without sidewalks.

Concepts are reinforced by repetition and review.

Eric Rustad, community relations officer for the Kettering Police Department, is the school resource officer for Kettering elementary schools.

He helps teach the children a song about wearing seat belts, and instructs them on how to read crosswalk signals to know when it's safe to cross a street.

"It's important information for a child to have and retain," Rustad said. "The class is taught in a dynamic way with information

that keeps them safe.

"When the kids see me in uniform or off duty, they recite the things they learned in safety village."

Rasor said the reason the safety village is held at the beginning of the summer is so that parents can reinforce the concepts all summer long, prior to school.

More than 17,000 children have attended safety village since its inception in 1966.

"Safety village is the first impression a lot of parents today had about getting ready for school. They have fond memories and stories."

Rasor speaks from experience. The 1983 graduate of Oakwood High School attended safety village in the late 1960s prior to starting kindergarten.

"What I remember the most is learning my right and left hand," Rasor said. "And I can remember going to a doctor's appointment and making sure I got out on the curb side of the car."

His own two sons, who are now in the fifth and seventh grades, also attended safety village.

"We have some third-generation kids attending safety village," said Dr. Jerry Barnett, who is retired from the Kettering schools and is a member of the Dor-Wood Optimist Club.

Barnett has been helping out with safety village since 1974.

"For the first nine years, Dor-Wood did the safety village on its own," Barnett said. "For the past 31 years, it's been a partnership between the city of Kettering and Dor-Wood."

Dor-Wood pays for two of the teachers, and makes sure the miniature safety buildings are set up and in good condition.

"This is our flagship program," Barnett said. "It's an excellent program with an excellent, experienced staff. We owe a lot to the city of Kettering for keeping it going."

Angelina Patron, 4, said her favorite part of the safety village was going outside and playing. "We colored, learned what pedestrian means, and what a stop sign looks like," she said.

Cameron Combs, 5, said his favorite part of the safety village



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KETTERING SAFETY VILLAGE participants zoom around in miniature, pedal-powered cars.

was driving the little cars.

"Then we crawled under fake smoke. It was not scary, but fun," he said.

He said he remembered that if there's a fire, he should call 911.

Rasor said this was the first year parents could register online for the program, and that 75 percent of the registrations were done through Kettering's city Web site.

Due to the school construction, the safety village was held at Southdale School, 1200 W. Dorothy Lane, but will move back to Orchard Park School, 600 E. Dorothy Lane, next year.

He said the safety village is open to all prekindergarten children in the Miami Valley.

The program consists of two hours a day for five consecutive days. Day care is available and sessions for parents are available concurrent with the children's program.

The cost for the program is \$10 for Kettering residents, and \$15 for nonresidents, and will run

through July 1.

For information, call 296-2520, or visit www.ketteringoh.org.