

# Youth fund seeks opportunities to help

A hand up, not a hand-out is the purpose of a new program to help area youth.

Working under the Russell County Area Community Foundation the Russell Area Youth Activities Fund offers a opportunity for youngsters to participate in "extra-curricular" activities, even

if they have limited means.

"We want every youngster who wants to be in band or play ball to have the chance to do so," said John O. Farmer IV. "Sometimes it is the cost of the \$80 pair of shoes which keeps a child from participating in an activity. We don't want any child to be left out, especially

because of monetary issues."

Individual and team funds are available for athletic programs, fine arts activities and community resources. Primarily targeted toward pre-teens, the program can assist area youngsters interested in attending faith camps, conventions, scout programs,

participating in football, basketball, baseball, track, soccer, volleyball, tennis, golf and dance activities. Voice, acting and art lessons can also meet the criteria for funding. Instrument rental, competition attendance, and music camps could also meet the qualifications of the program.

"What we need are teachers, coaches, group leaders, and others to be aware this fund exists," Farmer said. "The success of the program depends on identifying the kids who can benefit from the opportunities the foundation can help provide."

Funded entirely through donations, the RAYAF

program has more than \$50,000 in its endowment fund. Approximately 5 percent of that money is available every year to help area youth.

Noting a rapid loss of involvement in activities as youngsters grow older, the mission of the fund is to encourage all youth to

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be involved in activities with their peers and create a core group of leaders. The program hopes to provide an environment where youngsters and coaches/mentors need not worry about money issues.

Farmer and two others in the community, Vance Ruggels and Frank Schulte, helped organize and oversee the Russell Area Youth Activities Fund.

"We have heard of instances where individuals have stepped in and bought a youngster a glove to play ball with or loaned an instrument to a kid," Farmer said. "While those personal encounters are admirable, we know there are many more youngsters out there who need, and deserve help. We wanted to find a way to keep as many kids involved in activities as we can."

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Donations are being sought for the fund as the group has applied for a matching grant funding through the Grow II program from the Kansas Health Foundation. The Russell County Area Community Foundation oversees the funds for the program.

Although specific plans for the future depend on funding, one of the goals is a permanent youth facility in the community.