

A Real Knockout Program: Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Activity League Michael Poquette Youth Enrichment Center

In the town of Solvang there is a special place created by two Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Deputies. This facility is for the Santa Ynez Valley youth. The Michael Poquette Youth Enrichment Center, named after a deceased Sheriff's Deputy, is equipped with a boxing ring and state of the art training and safety equipment.

This Center is operated by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Activities League and is separate from the Sheriff's Department itself. It receives donations from the community and some grant money. There is no fee for the teenagers of the area to attend. The Sheriff's Activities League is part of the California State Police Activities League (one of the largest nonprofit organizations in the State) and prides itself on building "The Bond Between Cops and Kids." The Sheriff's Activities League is also a member of the National Police Activities League (PAL).

The owner of the former outlet mall in Solvang donated space for the Youth Center. Sheriff's deputies and a host of other volunteers donate their time to The Center. The deputies have stated, "We want to encourage kids to develop their minds and get excited about staying in school and getting an education."

The two deputies who initiated this program in the Santa Ynez Valley have taken the organization well beyond the endeavors of Activity Leagues in other communities. Volunteers at the Center provide positive character building and teach discipline in a structured training program. Role models range from a three-time Golden Gloves champion who helps with training to a retired businessman who raises funds to support the Center's programs.

A recent fund-raiser to benefit the Center featured the Sheriff's "Bad Boyz" team against the Harlem Ambassadors, a part of the famous Harlem Globetrotters basketball organization. The cost of the visiting team had been paid in advance by donations. That enabled all the proceeds to go to furthering the efforts of the Michael Poquette Center.

The Center has been open for over a year. The two deputies who began the idea of a special place for youth have seen their hard work and vision become a reality. In addition to boxing, the following programs have been provided:

- Judo
- Hip hop dance class
- Jujitsu
- Youth basketball
- Wrestling
- Leadership training

The deputies remain open and receptive to future programs and activities, which may include:

- Fencing
- Touch football team
- Off road programs
- Kendo
- Boxing and wrestling competitions

Additional volunteers will be needed to assist with these programs.

Last year, three Valley students, under a grant from PAL, attended a national leadership training program held in Orlando, Florida. In the future, deputies hope to be able to send additional teens to this annual event.

Finding 1

The Grand Jury finds this to be an excellent and positive program benefiting the youth of the Santa Ynez Valley.

Affected Agency

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department

Finding 1