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WYDLIFE DINNER A BIG SUCCESS

By Dave Grover
Wyldlife Program

Why would busy, grown adults choose to spend their precious spare time with a bunch of boisterous, zany middle schoolers that don't even belong to them? Better yet, what could have brought 30 middle school kids, their parents, and 100 or so supporters together on that cold, snowy Friday night in March? What could possibly be so compelling that these young people would actually choose to give up an afternoon and Friday night of movies, X-Box, and junk food to set tables and wait on their parents? In one word: WyldLife.

The WyldLife program was created specifically for middle schoolers as a refinement of Young Life, a Colorado Springs-based organization whose express *raison d'être* is to "bring the good news of Jesus Christ into the lives of adolescents with an approach that is respectful of who kids are and hopeful about who they can be."

Friday night, March 2, the efforts, oversight, and superb organization of the Andover WyldLife volunteers coupled with the energy of 30 to 40 kids and empowered by a huge bestowal of fervent zeal resulted in a remarkable event. The event itself was eclipsed only by the unrestrained generosity of community businesses, vendors, individuals, and contributors whose investment in WyldLife will reap dividends for generations.



The crowd of diners turns its attention to the presentations at the Wyldlife dinner. Photo: Laurie Ferguson

In spite of the weather, the evening was a gargantuan victory for our community and represented a wise investment in the future of our kids. Over \$2,000 was raised as a result of a Silent Auction that boasted over 90 items, many of them hand made by local artisans. Proctor's own Art Makechnie and his fabulous food force provided plate after plate of palate-pleasing platters packed with captivatingly creative cuisine until everyone was sufficiently satiated.

I listened as the keynote speaker, Rick Rogan, shared the impact that Young Life had on his life. As Young Life regional director for New York and New England, he had traveled from "the other Rochester," Rochester, NY, to challenge everyone to make a positive difference in the lives of kids. He related the Gospel account of Jesus Christ reaching out, touching, and healing the lepers and compared that to his own life. "My life was changed by people who reached out and connected with me as a teen," he said. He went on to say that WyldLife is about "connecting with kids and pointing them to their Creator."

East Andover's Cathy Ellis, who supplies a seemingly incessant source of energy to the weekly meetings with the kids, began to share the benefits of WyldLife with the group only to be "interrupted" by two guys, Brad Cote and Will Young, who volunteer themselves each week with the kids. They provided some comic relief with a slapstick skit and reappeared later in the program as the Pie Mafia and made a "hit" on Chris Bailey, a former Young Life leader.

One of the highlights of the evening was a multimedia presentation created by Canon Brownell which documented the previous year's activities including both summer camp and "Deep Freeze" winter camp.

Of course the Yankee Skeptic in all of us might question, "Yeah, but does all this hoopla have any results to show for itself in the lives of these kids?" How much of a difference can you make in a few hours every Monday night with "only" volunteers and no budget? It's a

fair question to ask in a culture that is lavishing more and more on programs for its youth and getting less and less bang for its buck.

Then I listened to some of the kids themselves as they stood before what must have seemed like an intimidating crowd and revealed how much they had learned about themselves and God and how much enjoyment they had doing it. Samantha Sherman described her involvement in "Girl's Night" at Pam Green's in New London where she has participated in "dessert and discussion" on Thursday nights for over a year. Henry Bendell, a la Dave Letterman, went through his "Top Five Things I've Learned at WyldLife" list, which culminated in #1: "To trust that God hears me and understands what I'm talking about." As each one shared their thoughts I found myself becoming less skeptical.

But the litmus test for results is the reality check that only a mom can provide. Moms are tuned in to the subtle changes and the emotional nuances of budding maturity in their children. So I asked one; Renee Goodwin. Of course, as any decent mother or father would say, her kids, Trevor and Elise "are great kids." Consequently much of the change Renee observes is in their attitude. "What I see in them that I really attribute to the influence of WyldLife is their eagerness to know God and develop their relationship to him." It sounds like Renee is convinced that her kids have genuinely changed from the inside out. Now there is an endorsement that can't be bought!

Wyldlife is planning two exciting free events in April.

On April 6 we are visiting a church in Loudon for an Easter performance.

On April 14 we'll show *Facing the Giants* at the East Andover Grange.

All middle and high schoolers are welcome, along with any parents who are interested.

For more information call Cathy Ellis at 735-5025.



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