

SCOTTSDALE REPUBLIC

OPINIONS EDITOR

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Leadership class illuminates community needs often ignored

The patter of fingertips against tabletops began shortly after the oversized check was brought into the room, its front facing away from the faces of the 43 members of the 27th class of Scottsdale Leadership, each taut with anticipation.

Their drumroll swelled to a crescendo as the check was slowly turned around to reveal its recipient, and for an instant it was easy to forget that as a member of the judging panel at last Friday's event, I was one of the few for whom the moment held no suspense.

Friday marked the culmination of several months of effort from the newest initiates of Scottsdale Leadership, a non-profit dedicated to fostering civic engagement and enhancing our city. The class had been divided into six groups, each of which undertook a project of its choosing to benefit a need it had identified in our community as part of an effort named Project Pay It Forward.

The climactic event enabled the groups to present what they had accomplished, with a \$2,000 donation to



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be awarded to the community organization that benefited from the winning project.

A festive atmosphere prevailed as the groups proudly shared the details of their endeavors, but the presentations exposed and addressed local problems with truly sobering implications. There are more than 50 boys in the East Valley alone hoping to be paired with a mentor through the local chapter of Big Brothers Big Sisters, for example. Alarming, males make up only 30 percent of the program's volunteers. It's hard to imagine why more men my age can't seem to understand that being a role model to a kid in need of one isn't a burden at all, but instead a wonderful opportunity to change two lives for the better.

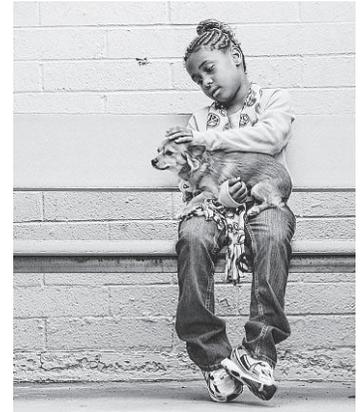
It also became apparent that tooth decay is such a pervasive issue among our youths that a free dental screening

set up by one of the groups at a Boys & Girls Clubs branch attracted 111 students and their families. Another group tackled childhood obesity by planting a garden for children to maintain and developing a curriculum to teach them more healthful eating habits.

The judging panel — there were six of us in total, including Scottsdale City Councilman Guy Phillips and former Mayor Sam Campana — ultimately awarded first place to a project that raised money and awareness for Family Promise of Greater Phoenix. The non-profit accommodates homeless families and their pets, and the winning group promoted this admirable and unique policy by organizing a "Doggie Drive-In" event I'm already looking forward to attending next year.

The presentations were uniformly impressive, creative and — most important — enlightening, in revealing and addressing issues within our community that too many of us continue to ignore.

Grant Martin is the opinions editor of the



Kori Gerstner benefited from Family Promise, which helps homeless families and their pets. MARK HENLE/THE REPUBLIC

Scottsdale Republic. You can follow him on Twitter at @GrantMartinAZ.