



WISH club gives back to community **Learning responsibility, persistence and dependability key for members**

By Stacy Pareti

Washington Middle School's club, **Washington Is Seriously Helping**, was started last fall by Kim Michels, community prevention specialist at Helping Services.

The program was the result of a grant Helping Services received from the Iowa Department of Public Health for Safe and Drug Free Schools.

It is part of an after school program that meets Wednesdays. Anyone can join and there are 16 volunteers so far.

"The purpose of this club is to give kids an avenue to give back to their school and community," Michels said.

Michels believes that service helps develop responsible, caring and active citizens. It gives them the opportunity to put their ideas into action.

"Students learn how to work with others, how to be persistent, how to overcome challenges, and what it feels like to be depended upon," she said.

While the message is serious, the middle schoolers have fun learning responsibility and helping the community.

In response to a *Telegraph Herald* editorial in Oct. regarding a shortage at the Dubuque Food Pantry, the club stepped in and started raising awareness.

While other food drives have been held at school, they made posters and set up the biggest one yet, raising 2,800 pounds of food.

"We brought in a ton of food – more than I expected," Jordan Lattner, an eighth grader, said.

To give students more incentive to donate, they awarded the home base with the most food a pizza party.

Some adult volunteers got involved as well, offering to weigh, load and unload the food with the students.

"We had an amazing response from the school," Michels said.

After delivering the food, the pantry offered a tour to the volunteers.

When the school had storm water runoff problems, the club was eager to help plant a rain garden. The group met with Pat Norton and Andy O'Hare, engineers from Durrant Group, to learn about the importance of rain gardens.

"They protect the school from flooding and drainage problems, help protect streams and lakes from pollutants, enhance the beauty of the grounds and provide a valuable habitat for birds, butterflies and insects," Michels said.

The students are working on a design for a 500-foot garden, and they have presented their proposal to Durrant for approval.

"At the last meeting, we drew a picture of what we wanted it to look like, what flowers we wanted to see and how we would arrange them," Gretchen Fischer, an eighth grader, said.

The plan is to make the rain garden in one day, on May 31.

"We have everything we need to begin; we just need to get working," Seneca Harris, a sixth grader, said.

The club has also done fundraising for the Dubuque Humane Society.

"We did a fundraiser at our dance where everyone donated fifty cents," Fischer said.

They also raised money for local families in need during the holidays.

"I learned a lot you can do to help other people," Harris said. "It's really appreciated no matter how big or small it is."