

Honoring outstanding collaboration/cooperation

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It's amazing and heartening what can be accomplished when we work together.

And, congratulations to parents, community members and educators in places like Anoka, Cambridge-Isanti, Farmington, Forest Lake, Lakeville, North Branch and St. Paul. Before entering 2009, I think it's worth paying attention to Minnesotans who are putting youngsters, rather than their own organizations or themselves first.

Over the last year, here are a few of the people and places I've found most impressive:

- Lakeville and Farmington school districts joined together for a parent fair, helping families understand how they could deal with a vast array of issues, including cyberbullies. Our children, now in their 30s, didn't have to deal with this when they were teenagers. But as technology emerges, there are new challenges. Lakeville and Farmington recognized this, and helped families understand how to respond. The districts had help from companies like Dakota Electric, Caribou and Target.

- Forest Lake, North Branch, White Bear, Chisago Lake area educators, district, charter and private school, joined together for an evening to provide information to families about their schools. This made gathering information much more convenient for families — something everyone appreciates. Yes, the schools do compete for students. But the parent fair (which will happen in 2009), illustrates the power of collaboration, along with competition.

- Recently, I wrote about how Cambridge Isanti school board member Gary Hawkins has worked with the district and grandfathers to help create new after school opportunities for youngsters. Hawkins and the district are tapping into the expertise, insights and energy that lots of seniors have, as they help encourage youngsters in everything from reading to fishing.

- Minnesota Twins catcher Joe Mauer, and some of the other Twins joined with St Paul parent Pat Leseman to help raise funds for youngsters with a disability. The Highland Friendship club, which started at a kitchen table,

now serves hundreds of youngsters throughout the metro area. Go to <http://www.highlandfriendshipclub.org>

• Anoka's STEP program, which helps high school youngsters develop strong applied skills and earn higher education credit, has been mentioned a few times this year. District officials tell me that folks from several other places have come to visit over the last two years.

• Former Minnesota Gov. Al Quie, now 85 years old, came out with a new book this fall, "Riding into the Sunrise." Quie, a devout "follower of Jesus Christ," teamed up with Mitch Pearlstein, who describes himself as "a Jewish fellow." Regardless of your religion (or no religion), I think the book is a wonderful statement about faith, service and civility. One of the book's themes is about how powerful people can overcome intense personal and philosophical disagreements.

• Finally, although he's not a Minnesotan, I heard from several readers about a column I wrote on Tom Bloch, CEO of a national tax preparation firm his family founded. Bloch decided to leave the company, and instead work with others, teaching math at inner city public schools.

Working with others won't solve all our problems. But collaboration is a key part of progress.

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