

Lifestyles

Orchard Park Historical Society sets operating hours

The Orchard Park Historical Society, 4287 S. Buffalo St., is open from 2 to 4 p.m. the first and third Saturdays of the month.

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Make the holidays special with a Compeer friend

by TIMOTHY CHIPP
Reporter

Oh, that holiday spirit. It's that time of year again — when giving to others becomes a priority in an overwhelmingly me-first world.

And with the approach of the holidays, many individuals are looking for ways to have a positive influence on the lives of other people. One of those helping is Orchard Park resident Andy Hvisdak.

Hvisdak is a volunteer with Compeer of Greater Buffalo, a local office of the multi-

biggest thing that they really need is a friend," said Ryan Daley, director of adult services. "They already have a ton of professionals in their lives. We provide friendships."

However, unlike Big Brother/Big Sister, Compeer works to provide that positive influence in the lives of countless individuals of all ages, from 5 to 95, who often have no other source of inspiration besides a phone call from their Compeer friend.

"Our mission is to use the power of volunteers to help improve the lives of

thing to do. For Hvisdak, it was more than that.

"The whole reason that got me into this program here, I suffered from depression myself," Hvisdak said. "I want to kind of give back, because I've known how it felt, to be down and to want somebody to just stop by, call on you. I've felt I have no friends; you feel isolated."

His experience has been a fruitful one, having spent more than one year with the same individual. And what has happened because of that has not only helped his friend, but also helped him.

"It gives back to you, too," he said. "As your friend has picked up somebody new to just be with, you yourself have somebody you can connect with, too. Somebody to go have coffee with."

Selecting a friend is based entirely on the volunteer. After being put through a variety of background checks, which include fingerprinting, the volunteer gets his or her choice of seven individuals in the program, based entirely on common interests and personality types. That's designed to make the friendship transition easier.

For Hvisdak, he has had such a wonderful experience with his friend that he decided to increase his commitment and take on another. With two friends, this husband and father of three children has a full schedule, yet finds time to be there for his Compeer friends as well.

"It doesn't take away from my home life or my family life in any way," he said. "And if anything, it's very positive."

Having those friends provides two different avenues for him to explore with his interests as well, he said. Because his two friends are into different things, it

helps him become more of a complete person.

"My relationships have just blossomed from these matchups," he said. "I find myself doing things with them that I can't do even with my close friends. If you find somebody with common interests, like one of my friends is into music, another one's into football, (it's more enjoyable)."

For more information on Compeer, visit online at the Web site www.compeerbuffalo.org or call 883-3331. The location is downtown at 135 Delaware Ave., Suite 210.



A sign outside its downtown office describes the motto of Compeer, a voluntary organization dedicated to pairing willing participants with children, adults and seniors who suffer from mental health problems. The volunteers become friends with their matches, which has been shown to help both individuals.

Photo by John Rusac
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national organization that strives to help youths designated as at-risk and adults diagnosed with varying degrees of mental illness.

For those not aware of Compeer, think of it as a specialized Big Brother/Big Sister organization. It pairs volunteers with patients identified by Compeer as needing a friend.

The key word, though, is "friend." Compeer volunteers are not asked to be mentors, mental health professionals or chauffeurs.

"Whether it's painting or watching a movie at your house together, making milkshakes or reading a similar book... the

children, adults and seniors who are striving for good mental health," he said.

Becoming a volunteer is easy. It doesn't require being a social worker. All it takes is an interest in making someone happy and an hour each week to do it.

Compeer volunteers, Daley said, are asked to spend one-on-one time with their friends for a minimum of four hours per month. Often, they find it easy to meet this requirement, even exceeding it on a regular basis, he said.

Why people decide to volunteer is different depending on the individual. Some join because they want to give back to their community. Some join because it's a good



Compeer volunteer Andy Hvisdak takes a break from a busy day to walk outside Buffalo City Hall, downtown. Hvisdak works with two Compeer friends, providing a stable force in their lives.

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HEALTH News

by Riffat Sadiq, M.D.

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EPILEPSY

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