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Two Communities, one Newspaper!

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Person of the Month: Craig Luedemann

By Bashe Said

When a reader recommended to us to write a story about the YouthCARE organization, like many others, I was not aware of YouthCARE's existence and Craig's realistic approach to the needs of urban youths. After the reader's followed up with his request, I decided to look into YouthCARE. Within few minutes of going through the website, I was amazed by the integrated philosophy and belief under which YouthCARE leads youth engagement.

After a few calls, I arranged to meet a couple members from YouthCARE at the Wild Roast Café in Minneapolis. "What can you tell me about YouthCARE?" I asked to Jeff Xiong, a 25 year old Hmong immigrant who was a camper during his teenage years and now works as the director of Camp Sunrise. "It is my family," he replied. "People call family only traditional families but there are other ways people can become families and YouthCARE is one big family," he added. Xiong told me that 10 other siblings from his family were participating in YouthCARE's programs. "Craig treats everyone like his kids," Xiong said. "You mean, Craig Luedemann, executive director," I asked. He said yes, adding that Craig has dedicated all his life helping inner city youth and this is a tradition that every one of us should consider; giving back to the community in which we all feel proud of. "Do you consider Craig a mentor to many Youth," I asked. "Yes, he is," he replies.

Xiong said YouthCARE prepares kids for the real world and not only to survive but to be productive contributors of the society. The



Craig Luedemann

youth develop social skills, they improve their self confidence and public speaking skills, respect others, and gain skills necessary to be whatever you want, and gain meaningful employment. Jeff Xiong first got involved with YouthCARE as a camper at Camp Sunrise from 1996-1999. In 2005, after studying at the University of Minnesota – Morris, he earned a Bachelor degree with a focus of Organizational Management. Jeff came back to Camp Sunrise as a Head Counselor and later became Camp Director.

"I have seen Craig's passion to see equality within all races," said Katheryn Pettie, a new employee at YouthCARE in charge of program development. Katheryn who moved from Hawaii in June of this year said that, "at YouthCARE you can feel everyone is involved and you can see this all the time." From the board members to staff to youth and the campers, there is a plethora of expertise. YouthCARE is a multi-cultural organization in every sense of the word and that is what I think the first lesson for each youth that walks in the door, equality. Additionally, YouthCARE helps youth to get along with everyone else and become a team player, a skill that is important in the world of work. "When I said equality, I also mean equality between genders," Katheryn added.

Katheryn said, "people still call Craig, even grown ups who were once campers at YouthCARE sometime in their early life, still

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call and stay in touch with Craig.” Craig basically adopts these kids as his own and tries to do whatever any parent would do for their kids. Katheryn also mentioned a program called the Young Women’s Mentoring Program. The program was established in 1990 and assisted many young women over the years.

“There are tremendous opportunities for many kids at YouthCARE,” said Bondo Nyembwe, a board member of YouthCARE. Craig and YouthCARE have provided a road map for our youth and the necessary tools to become leaders. These are the future our large community will embrace. There is no question in my mind that these youth are talented, responsible, caring, and conscious and YouthCARE is contributing to their successes.”

YouthCARE is a non-profit organization founded in 1974 to serve Minneapolis and St. Paul youth, age 7-18 years old. YouthCARE serves over 700 youth per year. The mission of YouthCARE is to promote respect for self and others, develop future leaders, and provide youth with multicultural activities and relationships with caring adults. It is evident that the stories above demonstrate the leadership of Craig Luedemann and justify his nomination for the person of the month.

In addition to great programs mentioned by Jeff and Katheryn, YouthCARE offers different opportunities for youth to be involved after school, on the weekend, and during the summer. YouthCARE is complementary and supports learning for youth during non-school hours.

Camp Sunrise is a year round outdoor education program focused on bringing together urban youth from diverse backgrounds to live and work in an outdoor multicultural community. Youth who attend

Camp Sunrise engage in environmental projects such as collecting waste along the St. Croix River, preservation of the ecosystem. The youth also learn financial literacy; the concept of sharing, saving, and spending. This class is taught by another board member Nathan Dungan, this demonstrates the involvement of YouthCARE’s board of directors. Through the assistance of another board member Tom Hubler some youth have attended the Strozzi Institute of Leadership in California and learn leadership styles.

YouthLEAD (Youth Leadership, Education, and Diversity) operates during the school year and provides follow up services to youth involved at Camp Sunrise. Key components include, employment training, youth led community discussions, the Youth Advisory Council, and monthly social recreational events. These activities are led by youth and demonstrate the involvement of all the youth at YouthCARE.

The Young Women’s Mentoring Program provides opportunities for young women to build leadership and self-sufficiency skills as they mentor younger girls who live in their neighborhoods. Youth participants in YouthCARE’s program are offered 100% scholarships. All of us are fortunate to be part of such organization that touches the lives of many young kids in positive ways, provide continuous learning for students and complement to the leadership development of our Youth. Craig Luedemann is the Executive Director and cofounder of YouthCARE in 1974 and has worked for YouthCARE for the past 33 years. He was Camp Sunrise program director from 1975-1995. Craig Luedemann is our person of the month. CONGRATULATIONS!

If you want to know more about the organization or participate any of its programs, please, call: 612.338.1233 or visit: www.youthcaremn.org.