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## ETHICS NOW!

By Ann Golden

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Civility is sorely lacking in our culture and right here in our own community, where curfews had to be enacted for two summers running, due to gang activity and large groups of teens who intimidated visitors to our own cool downtown.

Dr. Randall Parr, founder of the EarlyAct FirstKnight character and ethics education program has stated that "Ethical impairment reveals itself through symptoms like dishonesty, irresponsibility, disrespect, hatred, jealousy, greed and indifference to others...leading to antisocial behaviors and conditions such as crime, poverty, substance abuse, deception, ignorance, dependency and immorality."

So, how did we get to this point and what can be done about it?

Dr. Parr goes on to cite the breakdown of the traditional family and the trend toward children being more influenced by their greater environment than by the family. Music, movies, video games, television, super-stars, and even top corporate and government leaders may not set a good example for decent behavior. "A child's character matrix is programmed by the time they are about 12 years old, so proactive, consistent educational intervention is needed earlier, rather than later. The one place where constant influence upon this age group is most possible is the elementary and middle school classroom," says Dr. Parr.

The need for character education is recognized to the point of being mandated by twenty-three of our states. The reality is that funding does not necessarily follow mandates. There are many good character education resources available to educators to use in making lesson plans, which take their time and, perhaps, resources. There is an alternative that is a classroom-ready, award-winning curriculum, designed for implementation by teachers, and free to schools. EarlyAct FirstKnight is a proactive strategy that endeavors to prevent many antisocial behaviors before they occur, and

concentrates its efforts on children from kindergarten to eighth grade. Rotary Clubs sponsor this age- and grade-specific program in schools, providing the curriculum and sponsoring EarlyAct service clubs for the students, in which the students engage in service projects in their community, following Rotary's motto of "Service Above Self".

EAFK integrates the live-action theme of chivalrous knights with Rotary ethics in its unique teaching of such characteristics as Prowess, Loyalty, Justice, Defense, Faith, Largess, Franchise, Humility, Nobility and Courage. Students study each of these characteristics in a daily 10-minute lesson, which includes citing Rotary's Four-Way Test for making ethical decisions: Is it the Truth? Is it Fair to all concerned? Will it build Good-will and better Friendship? Will it be Beneficial to all concerned? Students who best exemplify each noble characteristic are recognized by their teachers and peers. At special ceremonies, these students are actually knighted by members of Knights of the Guild. Students are enthused by having real Knights in shining armor visit and talk with them, especially when they also bring their draped warhorses along for a live joust tournament.

Questions have been raised about the violence of a joust. Having been present at Powdersville Middle School's Tournament of Champions in the spring, I am able to say that no one gets hurt and the good knight always wins and brings the black knight around to the good side of things.

EarlyAct FirstKnight's founder, Dr. Randall Parr, has served as a Navy chaplain, and is an internationally published writer, consultant and frequent guest lecturer on character education at Universities and professional conferences. He has created effective ethics programs for young people over a 20-year period, winning accolades from all branches of our military, the Washington Times and members of Congress. EAFK was launched in his home town of Boerne, Texas, where he is a member of the Rotary Club of Boerne. EAFK is now in 50 schools in Texas, sponsored by individual Rotary Clubs, with support from some law enforcement agencies, encouraged by the decrease in crime in their cities. Todd Binnicker, principal of Powdersville Middle School, cites a new culture taking shape at his school. He states, "Numerous students and teachers have commented on how it is fun and rewarding to start the day with learning about life lessons as opposed to the normal standards-based curriculum. Our students are taking more responsibility for their actions. Academic achievement and attendance rates have risen, while discipline issues have decreased since implementing this program." It has also been noted that students are holding each other accountable for their actions and behaviors. They are also taking these ethical lessons home to their siblings, parents, friends and neighbors.

Our community will soon be honored by a visit from Dr. Parr, as the local EAFK program at Powdersville Middle School is the first one of the East Coast. Dr. Parr will participate in knighting ceremonies, a Tournament of Champions for Powdersville Middle School and a fund-raiser, titled Joust for Fun, which includes a Joust Tournament and Medieval Festival on October 30<sup>th</sup> at Riverbend Equestrian Park. During a week surrounding the Joust for Fun event, Dr. Parr will address several Rotary Clubs and Ethics Now!, a gathering of community leaders, sponsored by The Rutland Institute for

Ethics and The Rotary Club of Greenville Evening. More information about EAFK and about Joust for Fun is available at [www.eafk.org](http://www.eafk.org) and [www.JoustForFun.com](http://www.JoustForFun.com). Ann Golden can be reached at [agolden@goldencareerstrategies.com](mailto:agolden@goldencareerstrategies.com).

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