

Creating good community



Sherri Barber/The Coloradoan

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES: Joe Akmakjian, a fifth-grade student at Tavelli Elementary School, explains different aspects of good citizenship during the kickoff to Charac-

ter Fort Collins on Tuesday. The nonpolitical, nonreligious program is designed to encourage schoolchildren and community members to develop character.

City insists character counts

Program designed to enhance citizenship

By **STACY NICK**

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Got character?

If you live in Fort Collins, city officials want to make sure you and your children do.

With the help of various city and Larimer County officials and Poudre School District administrators, Fort Collins Mayor Ray Martinez kicked off the Character Fort Collins program Tuesday at Tavelli Elementary School, 1118 Miramont Drive.

"We're not building a city of walls and barriers," Martinez said. "We're building a city of people, and that is where it begins."

Last September, the city passed a City of Character resolution; the county and the PSD followed suit soon after. Now, one part of the process is to get out the character awareness message with an extensive advertising campaign using the slogan "Character:

Interested?

To find out more about Character Fort Collins, visit www.characterfortcollins.org or call 494-4676. The city also is putting on a character seminar for employers and employees from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Thursday at the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, 2501 Midpoint Drive.

It starts with me."

The goal is to create a "community lifestyle" of good character, said Bob Powell, president of the Character Council of Greater Fort Collins. The council is the 21-member, nonprofit organization heading up the Character Fort Collins program.

"We have a great community," Powell said, "but we are not immune to symptoms of (poor citizenship)."

Schools will play a huge role in the push to encourage character, local officials said.

"This is something we assume gets taught at home," Larimer County Commis-

sioner Kathay Rennels said, "but now we realize that we no longer can rest on that assumption."

PSD has been implementing character components into classroom lessons — 25 of the more than 40 schools in the district now have a character curriculum or culture in place, said PSD Board of Education President Steve Fobes.

Character development should start at home, Fobes said, and for many students it does; but this program will help fill in the gaps and reinforce lessons students are receiving from their parents.

Tavelli parent Cheryl

Zimlich said the school began its character program after a 1998 student survey listed "Other students treat me with respect" as the lowest scoring statement.

"It is important that every child feels respected and safe," said Zimlich, who also is co-chairperson of Tavelli's Got Character committee.

Tavelli student Joe Akmakjian, 10, said that's exactly how the program is making students feel.

"People here don't try to exclude others from activities," said Akmakjian, who uses a wheelchair and has multiple sclerosis. "(Other students) don't focus on my disability; they include me."

During the kickoff, Character Fort Collins commended five PSD elementary schools for their character programs: Cache La Poudre, Dunn, Kruse, Tavelli and Traut Core Knowledge.