



David Cabellero/The News

Leisure Worldeer John Stransky speaks and listens to the boys at the Joplin Ranch every Wednesday evening. His goal is to help the troubled youths develop self esteem.

PROFILE

Man-to-boy talk

Supporting hand for teens

By Michele Robertson
The News

Every Wednesday night, John Stransky convinces other Leisure World men to drive with him up a dark road to the top of a mountain to help conduct a meeting of delinquent boys.

For this effort the 86-year-old was recently chosen as the recipient of "The Tim Fitzharris Award," a statewide honor awarded by the Chief Probation Officers of California for "outstanding citizenship as evidence by extraordinary efforts to assist

troubled youth."

"I was surprised," said Stransky of the recognition. "I still am."

At a presentation banquet in San Jose earlier this month, Stransky received a standing ovation from the probation officers as his contributions were read.

Stransky was selected out of a crop of other volunteers who work with the state's probation departments, for his efforts at Joplin Boys Ranch.

Joplin is a minimum-security treatment facility for youths 13- to 18-year-olds. Located in Trabuco

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Canyon, the comprehensive junior high and high school works to rehabilitate through education. Boys, whose offenses range from minor to very serious felonies, stay from 60 days to a year.

Stransky has been making the drive to Joplin every Wednesday evening for 11 years. As a member of the Saddleback Kiwanis Club, he got involved through the organization.

"When I first went up, I realized it was something that I would be interested in and I enjoy working with kids," Stransky said. "So I just started coming up and six years ago they appointed me chairman (of the Service Gents Committee)."

The Service Gents is sponsored by the Kiwanis to help the boys at Joplin. Through weekly meetings boys that are eligible and want to participate learn about public speaking and much more.

"One of our main things up (at Joplin) is teaching them to get up and talk," Stransky said. "That builds their self-confidence. The first few times they're scared to death."

At each meeting four boys present prepared speeches from memory. All the boys must also introduce themselves and tell their future goals.

"It teaches us how to give a speech and not be afraid to get up in front of people," said Jesse of his association with the Service Gents. "We feel more at ease with ourselves."

"It's helped me find a pattern for setting goals," agreed Arnold, another member. "They (the Service Gents Committee) all have a desire to see someone take the world by storm."

"It helps us so much," Arnold added, "even when they don't know it. They help us."

Especially Stransky. "He's totally devoted," Jesse said. "He has more enthusiasm than the others."

Stransky hasn't missed more than two meetings a year. "I feel guilty when I'm not there," he said. "I figure I should be there."

The boys appreciate Stransky's efforts, said Norm Shattuck, assistant director at Joplin. "Although they think he's great," he said, "some of the kids will come into my office and ask, 'But, why is he doing this?'"

"After I explain to them," Shattuck continued, "they understand that some people are just that giving."

He describes Stransky as "amazing." Shattuck said it was Joplin, without telling Stransky,



John Stransky

that made the nomination within the Orange County Probation Department for the statewide competition.

In the nomination, Stransky is called "a model for citizen involvement in corrections. His motives are the best. . . He genuinely is concerned for the young men he meets and works hard trying to help them."

Shattuck said Stransky is positive, supportive and understanding with the boys. "They've been hurt negatively all their lives and he really helps them with that."

"We make it a point not to be too critical," Stransky said. "We always find something good to say because these kids, most of them, have been defeated all their lives and they lack self-confidence."

"That's one of the things we try to do to help," he said. "Build their self-confidence and show a little affection toward them. As we get to know the boys, we give them hugs when we get there and when we go. And let them know somebody cares about them."

As a retired sound mixer for Universal Studios, Stransky said he's done volunteer work throughout his life. He's especially proud of the work at Joplin.

"When I always leave there, I feel elated," Stransky said. "Like we've accomplished something. And I enjoy it or I wouldn't be going up there."

Stransky doesn't foresee giving it up either. "As long as I'm healthy and capable I'll keep on going," he said.

And Stransky adds, the thrill of being honored still hasn't worn off. "It seems kind of a shame for getting an award for something you enjoy doing."