

## Anthony Westbury: Fort Pierce group hopes to rebuild the village one Scout at a time

By Anthony Westbury

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The idea is in the very earliest stages, but one thing's for sure: A new Boy Scout troop planned for northwest Fort Pierce probably won't look like any troop we've seen before.

A powerful group of community movers and shakers, led by the irrepressible Scott Van Duzer, wants to offer youths a positive alternative to joining gangs and starting a life of violence and incarceration.

Van Duzer, who grew up without a strong male role model in his life, credits joining the Boy Scouts with starting him on the road to helping others. He believes a troop could offer kids hope for the future, something that's been in short supply on the avenues of Lincoln Park for far too long.

Van Duzer has put together an impressive group of community leaders and business people, none of whom have children in Scouting at the moment. Yet they agree a troop here could offer positive role models, social skills and possibly help kids see that economic success in life doesn't necessarily start and end with the NFL or NBA.

There have been past efforts to form a Scout troop in Lincoln Park, but they've foundered for a variety of reasons, according to Boy Scouts of America Gulfstream Council Chief Executive Officer Jeff Isaac. The Gulfstream Council oversees Scouting on the Treasure Coast and in Palm Beach County.

The biggest problem in the past has been a lack of consistency and planning, Isaac said. A program also must fit the community it represents.

"In traditional Scouting programs, parents sign the boys up, but this is a unique community," Isaac said. "The whole community needs to come together. A program for northwest Fort Pierce will probably concentrate on discipline, respect and so on."

Boy Scouts of America has developed a number of juvenile diversion programs in Chicago, Seattle, New York and Ohio that could be models for Fort Pierce.

For adults and children alike, Isaac stressed, commitment is the key to success. Another factor is financial.

“It costs \$24 for the uniform, then there are charges for field trips and camping,” Van Duzer said.

That’s where his foundation comes in. Van Duzer is hoping to raise \$8,000 to \$10,000 in seed money to get the program going.

Prominent attorney Lorenzo Williams is a member of the founding group. Two of his four children were Scouts, and Williams believes a new troop in Fort Pierce could “change an entire generation. The Scouts say change one boy and influence eight more,” Williams said. “In a year, I think we can start changing how kids think.”

“This can’t be a ‘lost generation.’ ” Van Duzer added, “(But) put good people in place and I think success is inevitable.”

To that end they’ve already selected a scoutmaster, Rusty Hines, a 21-year veteran with the St. Lucie County Fire District.

Isaac stressed that the group needs to solidify its volunteer base before worrying about recruiting boys. He wants the group to study successful juvenile diversion programs in cities across the country.

One interesting example is in Lorain County, Ohio. Many Scouts there have incarcerated mothers. Scouts visit their moms in prison and play basketball and volleyball together. The mothers lead classes in developing teamwork and respect. It breeds responsibility for mothers and their sons. To stay in the program and get regular visits from their children, the moms must remain on their best behavior.

Scouting emphasizes respect, teamwork and self-reliance, qualities the 11-, 12- and 13-year-olds in northwest Fort Pierce could certainly use. Camping and field trips would also expose them to the outside world and all its possibilities.

That was one of the main motivations behind the Avenue D Boys (and now Girls) Choir. Look at the success that has become.

I applaud the Scouting idea for Lincoln Park. Offering a program that builds self-esteem and make boys actually want to toe the line seems infinitely preferable to coming up with a new law to stop bad behavior.

There’s talk of revisiting the “no saggy pants” problem in the city with a local ordinance. Yet I think if we can reach a few of those teens most at risk in Lincoln Park before the gangs do, we won’t have to worry about saggy pants. They’ll be self-starters for life — and use belts.

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