Rotary Interact club holds first meeting

By Jess Field

The Petersburg High School has a new club called Rotary Interact, and it held its first meeting last month with around 20 interested kids. The club is open to any student in the eighth grade or above and the goal is for students to improve their community through regular service work.

PHS teacher Ginger Evens says the group will meet once a month and complete a project once a month also. The project could be service oriented like partnering with the Salvation Army for a winter coat drive for teens, a canned food drive or making improvements to beautify the community. Evens says another Interact club recently painted garbage dumpsters to do away with their drab gray color.

“It could be a larger one or small project that people don’t realize the kids are doing,” she says. “It could be helping out at a volleyball game.”

Interact offers kids who want to get involved a great opportunity to do just that. At the club’s first meeting the students discussed project ideas. Evens says she’s just a supervisor and the kids are making the decisions. Students interested in the club range from kids in multiple activities or sports already to those seeking their first opportunity to get involved, she says.

“That’s what you want. You want different kids in there and having something everyone can be involved in,” Evens says. “Which I think is a lot of fun.”

It’s all about trying to build a program and allowing students to gain experience that could help them in the future. They also talked about what kind of officers the club needs in addition to required positions. One idea the club is getting behind is having an Interact representative report to the student government or even having a student representative report to the Petersburg Borough Assembly.

The club appealed to Evens because students will have to make a plan and follow through with it in order to complete a service project. It’s a learning experience that requires making contacts and communicating with members of the community, borough staff or non-profit organizations.

“The students being empowered, I think that’s the most important goal for me,” Evens says.

Karen Dillman is helping Evens establish the club. Both women are members of the local Rotary Club, and both are very excited about the possibilities for students to grow as individuals and part of a team. Dillman found out about Interact when she was living in Boise last winter and ran into a group of local Interact students.

“I was very impressed by their enthusiasm to take charge of community service projects that they were interested in,” she says.

Dillman says another aspect of the club she really likes is Interact students also complete one international project a year. It helps foster the communication skills, learn about new cultures and helps them think outside the box.

“The Interact club in Juneau, I guess, has gone so far as to raise money on their own to go to Africa,” Dillman says. “They’ve worked in a village in Uganda for the last few years. There’s huge potential, it just depends on what the kids want to do.”

For Dillman, the best part about Interact is the students making the decisions. She really likes the hands-off approach for adults. The Petersburg students also have the potential to travel to villages in Alaska to do service projects, she says.

“It’s whatever they want to do,” Dillman says. “There’s lots of options and that’s what’s sort of cool about it.”

Dillman says getting students together to discuss ideas starts the ownership process of the service projects. The students elected officials earlier this week, including Jasmine Ieremia being selected as club president and Chandler Strickland taking the vice president position. Any students interested in joining Interact or just checking it out are encouraged to talk with Ginger Evens. Interact’s meeting this month will be held Monday, Nov. 21 at 12:15 p.m. in Evens’ classroom.