



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTOS BY BRIAN PASSINO

Tom O'Connell, left, is joined by caddie Steven Spizzirri on the back nine at Petrifying Springs Park Golf Course on Wednesday. The caddies are provided and paid through the Caddie and Leadership Academy of Southeast Wisconsin.

Youth caddie program helps build character

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SOMERS — A youth caddie program, working in partnership with Kenosha County, is offering summer jobs and leadership training to local teenagers.



The Caddie & Leadership Academy of Southeastern Wisconsin, started in 2015, uses caddying to mentor low-income kids at Petrifying Springs Golf Course.

Director Phil Poletti based the program on a similar youth caddie program in Colorado.

The program trains the teens to be caddies and gives them jobs for eight weeks during the summer.

It's also partially aimed at identifying candidates for the Chick Evans caddie scholarship, Poletti said, which pays for caddies' university housing and tuition.

Ultimately, the program is about building character, Poletti said.

"Any time you can round off some of the edges on a young person, or help turn the corner, you do it," said Kenosha County Executive Jim Kreuser.

From the county's perspective, the program is a win-win, Kreuser said. Funded through donations and private fundraising,



Kellon Reed, left, caddies for Kent Demers on the back nine at Petrifying Springs Park Golf Course.

it adds value to the community and offers the teens an opportunity to grow as a person during their summer job, he said.

Golfers serve as mentors

Marcus Gallo, who works directly with

the caddies, said the leadership training and experience helps them learn and understand more about themselves.

Gallo, a teacher and golf coach at Tremper High School, said he matches caddies with patrons based on their personality and who he thinks the teenager can learn from the most.

Each individual round on the links is an opportunity for the teen to be mentored by someone who isn't a parent or teacher, Poletti said.

"By the end of (last) summer, they were 14-, 15-year-old young men and women," Poletti said. "They knew how to conduct themselves. They knew how to communicate. They knew how to actually carry on a conversation with an adult without looking at their cellphone or being distracted."

With 20 positions available, caddies are chosen based upon academics, strength of character and financial need, Poletti said.

Of the 20 caddies from the summer of 2015, six went on to earn jobs as caddies at Lake Geneva Country Club.

"But for this training, they wouldn't have the opportunity to go over there," Kreuser said.

Poletti is working with officials from Milwaukee County to develop another youth caddie program in Brown Deer. He hopes to eventually have up to 30 chapters around the country.