

Meet Your Neighbor: Oxley aids youth to STRIVE for improvements

Sheri Trusty 1:41 p.m. EDT April 19, 2015



(Photo: Sheri Trusty/For The News-Messenger)

FREMONT – For the past five years, retired dentist Dr. Ralph Oxley has spent time helping local seniors succeed in school so they can ultimately succeed in life. Oxley is a mentor with the Fremont Rotary STRIVE Program at Ross High School.

Through the STRIVE (Taking a Renewed Interest in the Value of Education) Program, Oxley meets with a mentee about every two weeks to discuss the student's present situation, encourage him to make improvements in his academic and personal life, and help him plan future goals.

"We talk about self-esteem and my experiences in college and what to expect there and any other concerns the students may have," Oxley said. "It's sort of a bonding discussion. I've been at it for about five years with five different students. I think all of (the previous mentees) have gone to college."

This year, Oxley is mentoring Sam Contreras, who plans to attend Bowling Green State University next fall. He said he joined the STRIVE program to gain direction in areas he felt he needed assistance.

"I thought I needed help with school. My attendance was pretty bad, and I thought that this program would help," Contreras said. "It actually brought my attendance up a lot and brought my grades up a lot. I went from being a 'C' student to being an 'A' and 'B' student."

Those were some of the main goals of the program.

"There are three things they strive for – improved attendance, grades and discipline," Oxley said. "Students are rewarded for improved attendance and grades. The Rotary club provides gift cards for those that improve each month."

STRIVE students gather for a group meeting once a month, and they have access to help applying for college.

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: Dr. Ralph Oxley and Sam Contreras talk during one of their twice-monthly meetings at Ross High School. The mentor relationship between the two helped Contreras make huge leaps in his high school career, and he is now planning to attend Bowling Green State University next fall. (Photo: Sheri Trusty/For The News-Messenger)

"Dr. Oxley helped me decide where I wanted to go to college. He made it easy. He talked about the pros and cons," Contreras said. "The STRIVE clinic helped me with the application process."

Contreras credits a lot of his school success to Oxley.

"He's a really great guy. He shared a lot of wisdom with me. I learned a lot from him," he said.

Cassandra Aaron, an assistant to the ACE/STRIVE program coordinator at Ross, is also a STRIVE mentor. Her son Dmitre Aaron, now a University of Akron student, was mentored by Oxley two years ago. She said Oxley helped "keep him on track" by encouraging him to keep up with his classwork and choose good friends.

"When he showed an interest in the University of Akron, Dr. Oxley started researching the college. He gave him a lot of direction," Cassandra said. "Any student that takes advantage of this program – their academics are better."

Cassandra said the mentors' influence doesn't stop when the students graduate from high school.

"I can see, over the course of the last few years, how the relationship has changed. It has really helped Dmitre. It exposed him to a lot and put things in a different direction," she said. "The relationship endures (between mentors and mentees). When Dmitre comes in, he'll call Dr. Oxley."

Dmitre said Oxley was a great influence on him.

"I think Dr. Oxley was a positive leader. He gave me advice on the different perspectives of college and how it would affect me. He helped me keep up on my studies, have the right people in my life and be successful," Dmitre said. "He gave me great advice that I still follow to this day."

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