

# Class of 2009 giving a gift that matters

by **MATT GEIGER**  
Times-Tribune

As graduation approaches, high school seniors in wealthy communities such as Middleton are often focused on little more than planning for a leisurely summer.

Here in Middleton, the class of 2009 has set its sights on something much bigger.

Each year Middleton High School's graduating class takes the money it has accumulated over the previous four years and uses it to purchase items for the school or gifts for students and organizations in the community. This year's class is donating all of its money — a total of \$11,650 — to Middleton Outreach Ministry (MOM).

In addition, the class's altruism seems to be contagious, and they have more than doubled the original amount with donations from the greater community.

"Traditionally the class garners proceeds from the sale of homecoming [tickets], the prom, and various other fundraisers over the course of four years," said co-class president Sean Jackson. "Due to the dire state of the economy we decided our money would be best used for our neighbors."

Fellow class president Steve Ticknor said considering the growing number of people in need, lighthearted gifts seemed increasingly inappropriate.

"People were talking about using all the money to get a good band to play at our [senior] trip, or using \$6000 of it for inflatable games, or even splitting the money up and giving equal portions (say \$25) to everyone in the class," Ticknor said.

Through speeches to various groups, advocates like Ticknor convinced classmates that giving the

money to MOM, which runs various programs including a food pantry and rental assistance, was the best option.

"Don't all people deserve the right to food and shelter? To a life where they have the dignity to go to school without feeling helpless because of their situation? In my opinion the government doesn't give enough attention to these needs," Ticknor told classmates. "So it's the private citizens who must rise to the occasion and do all they can to solve these problems."

Ticknor said in the past he often dreamed of traveling to a third world country to help people mired in destitution. Recently, however, he realized the face of poverty was more domestic than many realize.

"The economic crisis has awoken me from that pursuit," he explained. "In our own backyards there are opportunities to provide food, shelter, and clean water. We don't need to travel thousands of miles to make a difference."

Dave Miller, MOM's executive director, said both the money and the sentiment behind it would have an impact on those in need.

"I think this is very significant for our organization — it's more than just the funds, it's the fact that they are showing the community how important what we do is," Miller said.

Miller said the money would help fund "every aspect" of MOM's operations.

"As you can imagine, money is tight for everyone this year and our demand [at the food pantry] is up by 20 percent or more so far," he continued.

"Just think of what impact eleven thousand dollars could [have]," Ticknor commented. "Real people. Real change."

And as it turns out, the 2009 Change the World Challenge, as students named it, will result in far more than \$11,650 for those in need.

Student leaders gave a presentation about their donation at last week's Get Moving Middleton, a monthly meeting sponsored by the city's chamber of commerce. They drew a standing ovation and brought in an additional \$1770 in donations from individuals that day.

The students' decision had an even greater impact, inspiring local officials to extend the challenge to those they work with.

## A challenge to the community

### Businesses:

Match the students' donation ratio of \$25 per person among employees.

### Community:

Match the \$25 per person ratio and/or provide service for 2.5 hours.

### Schools:

Elementary schools - raise \$0.25 per student, middle schools - raise \$2.50 per student.

Middleton city administrator Mike Davis sent out an email last week asking city employees to each consider donating \$25 — roughly the amount each high school student gave up — for the cause.

"I'm passing along the challenge to each of you," Davis wrote in an email to city staff. "If [city] employees would each contribute an additional \$25 to Middleton Outreach Ministry, we would collect about \$3,250."

Davis said he plans to collect donations at City Hall throughout the month of April.

District 6 alderwoman Susan West also extended the drive's reach, asking her constituents to consider donating to the cause.

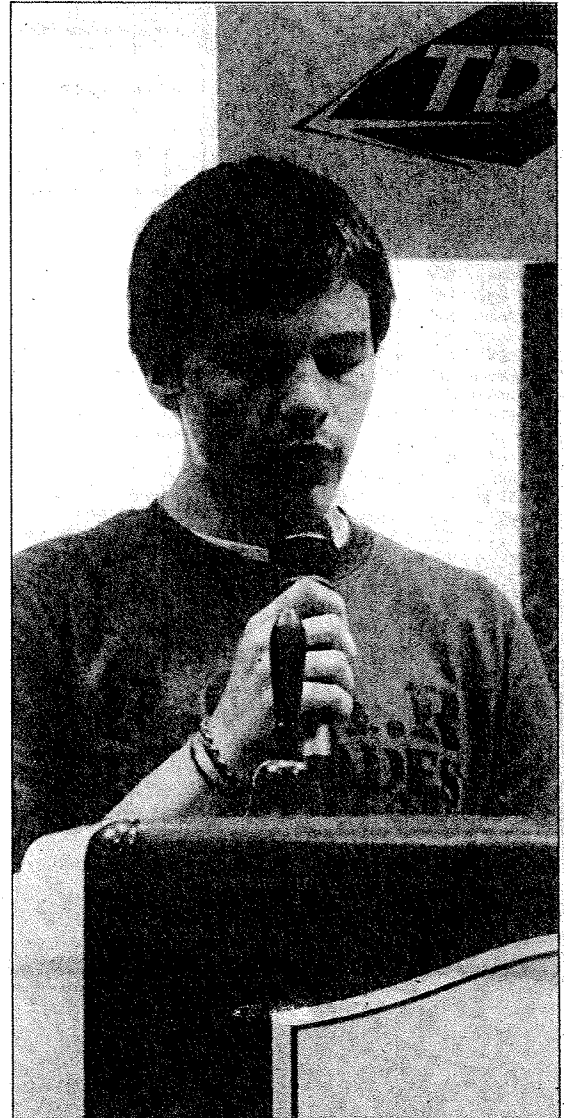
"I am very proud to represent such an involved community," West added.

Ticknor was quick to shift the focus off of the class and back onto those who are struggling to survive.

"Hunger isn't an idea to them, it's a reality," he said. "It's ironic that we can sit inside a heated school and even discuss [this]."

Now the challenge has been extended to the entire community, and as of Monday afternoon, the 2009 Change the World Challenge had raised \$23,765 from 10 businesses, 85 individuals and the senior class.

Checks should be made out to Middleton Outreach Ministry, and mailed to 7432 Hubbard Avenue, Middleton, Wisconsin 53562. For more information visit [www.changetheworldchallenge.com](http://www.changetheworldchallenge.com).



Times-Tribune photo by Matt Geiger

Middleton High School senior Steve Ticknor, who helped spearhead a widespread drive to donate money to Middleton Outreach Ministry, spoke at a Middleton Chamber of Commerce breakfast on Thursday, April 2 at the Hilton Garden Inn.

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