

## Summertime success

■ An effort adding life lessons to the fun of the Sun Dawgs program could be expanded in north Omaha next summer.

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Omaha church and neighborhood volunteers heard a common refrain when they walked door-to-door and met in church halls this spring to talk with people about violence and other community concerns.

Kids need more positive things to do in the summertime.

The volunteers responded



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The city-sponsored Sun Dawgs recreation program, held at sites such as this one at Sunnyslope Park, give young people something fun to do during the summer.

by bringing as many youths as possible into an existing summer recreation program in one neighborhood, and then working life lessons into the activities.

The results looked promis-

ing enough that Mayor Mike Fahey proposes to spend \$24,000 next year on a pilot program to expand the hours at two Sun Dawgs sites. Working with Omaha Together One  
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## Sun Dawgs: Volunteers' efforts draw more kids

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Community, city officials also would add an anti-violence curriculum to the program.

Details haven't been determined. The City Council hasn't approved Fahey's budget.

If the proposal goes forward, one location likely would be the campus of Holy Name Parish and School, 2901 Fontenelle Blvd., where this year's volunteer efforts were channeled. The other site currently under consideration is Adams Park, 3230 John Creighton Blvd.

Sun Dawgs is the City of Omaha summer recreation program based mostly in city parks. This year, it runs from June 9 through July 31.

It's free and open to youths ages 6 to 15. City parks employees lead activities such as arts and crafts, sports, games and field trips. The city totes its portable, 24-foot-high rock-climbing wall around to the various sites.

Eighteen locations are open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eight others are open from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Another nine are open 1:30

to 4 p.m. The Elmwood Park site is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., thanks to private funding.

Holy Name and Adams Park are among the more popular of Sun Dawgs' sites. The two have something that a lot of Sun Dawgs locations don't have: buildings. So unlike most locations, they don't have to shut down when it rains. Holy Name also allows Sun Dawgs to use its gymnasium, a popular draw for basketball-playing adolescents.

"Most of my friends and I, we are down here all day, every day," 15-year-old Jason Dyer said while taking a break from a basketball game Thursday. "I get out of bed and look forward to it every morning."

Omaha Together One Community, a coalition of religious congregations and other groups that is known as OTOC, has a history of involvement with summer youth programs, including Sun Dawgs.

The latest effort came after a series of meetings in congregations across the city — some OTOC members and some not — in response to the Von Maur kill-

ings and other street violence in Omaha, said Mark Darby, an OTOC organizer.

It's part of what those involved hope will be a multi-pronged approach to the problem.

This spring, some Holy Name members and others joined people from Risen Son Baptist Church, 4932 Ohio St., on walks to talk with people about the neighborhood and Sun Dawgs, said Susan Kuhlmann, a Holy Name parishioner and co-chairwoman of OTOC's response-to-violence committee.

She said those walks are at least partly responsible for more kids going to the Holy Name site this year, when, city officials say, city-wide attendance at Sun Dawgs and city pools is down due to rainy weather. Holy Name's attendance of 1,210 through July 11 is up about 8 percent over 2007.

The programming has helped too, Darby said. In addition to good work from the regular staff, he said, a volunteer coach has worked weekly with the basketball players on hoops skills, plus sportsmanship and conflict

resolution. A nurse has taught first aid. College student mentors have visited.

Those things went well, Darby said, but the thinking for next summer is to focus more specifically on violence prevention. He said leaders are looking at using a locally tailored variation on a school-based program called "Too Good for Violence."

Parks Director Steve Scarpello said he has begun talking with OTOC people about that issue. City officials are on board with violence prevention, he said, as long as Sun Dawgs remains primarily recreational.

That, and the prospect of longer hours, sounded good to Jason Dyer and other kids at Holy Name such as Marsha Pittman, 14.

"I like it here," Pittman said. "I would stay longer. It gives you something to do."

World-Herald staff writer Jonathon Braden contributed to this report.

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