

## EDITORIALS

# Make a difference

**O**UR COMMUNITY has talked a lot about what's wrong with our local public schools. And rightfully so, given our students' test scores.

But there also are a lot of good things in our schools: Dedicated teachers overwhelmed by an excessive student-to-teacher ratio but who nonetheless use their own money to buy classroom supplies; principals and other school administrators who work long hours attending school events, working individually with students and parents on this or that problem, acting often like firefighters constantly putting out hot spots; and citizen volunteers who try to help fill the gaps that educators simply cannot fill.

It's those citizens and a special program in local schools that we want to praise today, a program in which we urge each of you to participate.

That program is the United Way of Pueblo County's middle school mentoring program, which pairs a community-minded man or woman with a middle school student. Those individuals spend one hour each week with his or her assigned student, mentoring and encouraging and providing a positive role model. It might not

sound like much, but that one hour is huge. For too many students, that kind of positive adult support may be all they get.

The program, now in its sixth year, began at Heaton Middle School with 10 mentors. Last year, an El Pomar grant enabled United Way to expand the program. Last year, 84 mentors touched the lives of 86 students at Heaton, Liberty Point International, Roncalli STEM Academy and Heroes K-8 Academy.

But this year, the number of mentors is down. United Way needs more volunteers.

Only one hour a week to make an impact on a young person.

We all talk about improving our schools, about helping our youths grow to become productive and engaged citizens.

Well, as they say, talk is cheap.

One hour a week. Call United Way today, 225-8580. Ask for Lawrence Kochis. He'll take it from there.

Soon, you'll be making a significant difference in a student's life. And, from the satisfaction of doing that, you'll be making a significant difference in your life as well.