

# Building character: How adults can make a difference in the life of a child

## Lucky U partners with 'America's Promise' to build a caring community

BY GINNY PRIVITAR

**CHESTER** — No one would think of trying to win at football without a coach — why should life be any different?

Each youngster deserves to have a caring adult in their corner, just knowing that a caring adult is there for them can help children build character, make wise choices, stay in school and contribute to society. But many children do not have such a friend.

Ed Stoddard, a former teacher, principal and school superintendent in the Chester school district, has devoted years of thought and research to this central idea: that the whole community, coming together, can benefit everyone.

Stoddard says his organization, Lucky U Corp. (Lessons Used in Character Knowledge for Youth Unity), has the tools to do just that. At its heart is an "effort to connect each young person in the community with one caring community member." The adult commits to "be there" when the youth needs a caring adult, willing to give guidance and support, or just listen. The goal is not only to build character and leadership skills, but to address community concerns like bullying and drop-out rates.

"From the very beginning, I did not want to create another organization," he said.



PHOTO BY GINNY PRIVITAR  
**Ed Stoddard**

Instead, Lucky U seeks to work with and assist existing organizations — bringing together "caring partners": organizations, businesses, adults and the youngsters who will be the community's future.

This program is like a circle, with each part connecting to and supporting the others. Lucky U invites businesses to offer a discount on their product or service, which generates customers and publicity for business owners (please see sidebar for participating businesses).

Local organizations, including sports clubs, Scouts, houses of worship, non-profit groups, and school groups, can then sell the Lucky U benefit cards to their adult supporters and keep the majority share of the proceeds.

Those who buy the cards can use them to get discounts at participating businesses. But, most important, those who purchase the card will be given another card to give in time to a young person. No cost is involved in this, only a willingness to have a positive impact on a young life.

One student, Nadia Gushin, had this to say: "The Lucky U program is unique in that the most important factor is building healthy relationships. Throughout my confusing and demanding high school years, I found a friend and teacher in Mr. Stoddard."

This last card is at the center of it all: On it is a pledge the young person makes to himself to live in a positive manner and an acknowledgement that the individual's actions affect self and others.

As one senior said, "This is the card I should have with me when I go out at night!"



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Nadia Gushin, former student

— a reminder of the promise they made to themselves to meet life's challenges with strength of character. The adult giving this card will take a few minutes to talk to the young person about the importance of their life and direction, not only for themselves, but for the community.

It is Stoddard's hope that the adult will offer to be a caring listener or supportive guide/advocate/counselor to the young person, should that need arise. In Stoddard's view this is not mentoring. Lucky U does not look for that level of time and commitment, but rather a connection with a caring adult.

Just one such friend can mean all the difference in how the young person makes choices in life. Stoddard urges those who think character education is important to do something about it: support young people and help them build the character and skills needed to deal with everything life may throw at them. Buying candy or cookies from sponsoring organizations is needed, but it is not enough. An investment of time and self will make a difference.

Lucky U, along with the Orange County Youth Bureau, is reaching out to the community now. The Chester Kiwanis Club has been involved with Lucky U for some time. But more help is needed. Businesses can sign up as partners. Youth groups or service organizations wishing to partici-

## **CHESTER BUSINESSES ACCEPTING LUCKY U BENEFIT CARD**

**Allan's Falafel**

115 Main St.

**Chester Greenery and Gifts**

37 Brookside Ave.

**Floral Cottage LLC**

55 Brookside Ave.

**Hair's Judy**

131 Main St.

**KoKoPelli Cookie Company**

139 Main St.

**Learning Land Daycare and Preschool**

1 Carpenter Rd.

**Main St. Pizzeria**

129 Main St.

**19 Main Street restaurant**

Pixie Dust Giftshop

18 Main St.

**Reliant Business Solutions, Inc.**

144 Main St.

**Soho Salons**

78 Brookside Ave. # 136

**Studio 94 Hair Salon**

32 State Route 17M

**Super Communications**

69 Brookside Ave.

**T.M. Contracting of Orange County**

1663 State Route 17M West

pate in the benefit card program can contact Stoddard at 469-4769 or visit [www.luckyu.com](http://www.luckyu.com). Individuals wishing to obtain benefit cards/youth cards can contact him for the name of a sponsoring organization. Other communities can find out how to implement this program in their area.

An official ceremony recognizing Orange County as one of America's Promise Alliance's "100 Best Communities for Young People" will be held at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 9, in the Chester Academy auditorium (see related story on page 9 for more information). It will be the first to be recognized in New York State. Lucky U, along with other organizations, partners with America's Promise, founded by General Colin Powell, and supports its goals, especially community connections for young people.