Instilling ethics

Responsibility, honesty, respect and motivation — these are four ideal ingredients that help build character. That's the consensus of Pinellas County teachers, PTA members and members of nearly 100 organizations in the county who responded to a recent survey by USF's Ethics Center.

As a result, "Commitment to Character" pilot programs for kindergartens and first-graders and fourth- and fifth-graders that stress these traits were launched in several public and private schools last fall. The program is designed by the Ethics Center.

Walsingham and Eisenhower elementary schools are two pilot schools for the program, says Robert Huntley, education coordinator for the Ethics Center, which compiled a guidebook and other teaching materials for the program. The book is more a resource guide than a manual, says Huntley, who notes that many teach-

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Drop-out prevention and an Oasis of hope

Tucked away in a corner of the campus is a one-room schoolhouse that few ever notice. Upstairs from the telephone guys, around the corner from the campus police, there's a place called The Oasis, and it's one of a kind. Each day, 15 eighth-graders trudge or gallop up its stairs to a small classroom, two teachers and one man's dream of changing their lives.

Among the hundreds of programs for at-risk kids, Oasis, like the patch of green it's named for — stands apart. It is the child of Jim Martin, founder and director, who believes passionately that education can redeem and liberate, that nature can heal, and that children are susceptible to both.

"Most of us respond to life with a series of knee-jerk reactions, but kids can be taught to choose how they respond to the people around them," says Martin. "They can be taught to take time to process things, make rational decisions and take responsibility for the choices they make."

Since 1986, Oasis has taken in students from middle schools all over Pinellas County. Guidance counselors know it as a place for students whom teachers just can't seem to reach. They're not the ones who disrupt the class or flunk tests, but the ones who just seem to be drifting away. Martin describes the typical Oasis student as "just a kid with reasonable intelligence, who with some patience, tolerance and attention will choose to be different." Oasis, he says, will plant the seeds. It will be the child who makes the choices.

Understanding the secret of Oasis involves taking a trip back in time with Martin. It is 1973, and Martin, a high school social studies teacher, has signed up, along with four other Pinellas County teachers, for an expedition with Outward Bound. The Outward Bound program, originally conceived for city folk, is a wilderness challenge trip aimed at fostering self-confidence and mutual trust in its participants. They spend a
Campus future looks good

Happy New Year to all! As we proceed into 1997, our focus will be on continuing the culture of educational excellence at the campus.

We have much to be proud of. The Department of Marine Science is nationally recognized and is consistently one of the top research and grant award recipients in the entire State University System.

Our Ethics Center, while still young, is rapidly receiving acclaim and respect as one of the country's leaders in this increasingly important discipline.

The Teacher for All Children program is an exemplary five-year program preparing future educators of children with disabilities. This program, which enables students to earn a master's degree, is unique to the state.

Our other superlative programs include honors studies, journalism, accounting and criminology.

Along with the academic focus, we will also concentrate on fulfilling our long-range master plan. That means:

- The expansion of the Campus Activities Center, with a student union and a theater/gallery complex to seat 800-1,000 people. The cost would be $8-10 million.
- A new 25,000 square foot Ethics Center. Currently the Ethics Center is bursting at the seams. An appropriate classroom/auditorium and offices would cost about $2.5 million.
- Another classroom/office building similar to Coquina Hall that would allow the campus to offer more classes, boost enrollment and increase the number of faculty. The 50,000 square foot structure would cost about $5 million.

As you can see, we have big plans for the campus for the rest of the decade, but I believe that our goals are achievable.

Sailing center slated

A two-story sailing center, complete with a workshop area for boat repairs and a classroom for sailing instruction, is slated for construction on campus.

The $250,000 sailing center will be added to the existing Haney Landing located on the southwest harbor side area of the campus. The facility will be a boon to the campus' sailing team, which competes in college regattas. After the center is built this spring, the campus will expand its fleet with the acquisition of eight new sailboats and one powerboat. The new sailboats will allow the campus to host small intercollegiate regattas and allow more students to take navigation and sailing classes.

Other improvements planned are the purchase of a floating dock system that will provide easier boat launching and recovery. USF St. Petersburg's watercraft program was established in 1970.

Black named chair of national ethics panel

Jay Black, Poynter Jamison Endowed Chair in Media Ethics and Press Policy at USF St. Petersburg, was appointed 1996-97 National Ethics Chair for the Society of Professional Journalists.

As SPJ's Ethics Chair, he will convene educational task forces to study ethical issues in media and work with news organizations and schools throughout the country.

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Black also testified before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Government Information in Washington, D.C., in December.

The subcommittee held a hearing on the FBI's investigation into the terrorist bombing during the 1986 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.

Black commented on media coverage of the Atlanta Olympic bombing and answered committee members' questions. He was on the stand with Richard Jewell, the former bombing suspect, and FBI Director Louis Freeh.

In addition to his teaching and research at USF St. Petersburg and USF's Ethics Center, Black is the author of several books, including Doing Ethics in Journalism and Reinventing Media: 1996 Update to Introduction to Media Communication. He teaches media ethics at USF St. Petersburg and is affiliated with USF's Ethics Center.

Local landmark comes to campus

A St. Petersburg landmark — the last remaining Gandy Bridge tower — was moved to the campus in June.

The yellow concrete-and-stucco tower, minus its red clay tile roof, now rests in front of Physical Plant, at the start of the Bayboro Harbor peninsula that leads to the marine science department. The site was chosen in keeping with the tower's history of serving as an entrance marker to a waterway.

The tower was donated to the campus by the Florida Department of Transportation, where it sat in a DOT right-of-way in front of the Banana Boat Bayside Sports Bar. The tower was one of four that were beacons to the original Gandy Bridge. Two towers were located on the Tampa side and the other two were on the St. Petersburg side. All reportedly were lantern-lit.

The campus is refurbishing the tower to its former glory. The leaky and damaged roof, taken off during the move, is being repaired and the tower again has light.

"We're thrilled to save another historic structure and keep a piece of early St. Petersburg intact," said Dean Bill Heller.

Betty Irwin, a community volunteer, was committed to saving the tower. She and her husband formerly owned the land where the tower sat, and Irwin alerted Heller that the tower needed a new home. The campus plans to try to get the tower listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
month learning to overcome obstacles in the natural world and in themselves.

"Those 28 days at Outward Bound shook me, spun me — the physical danger, the relationships with people. It was a traumatic experience, and the most productive one of my whole life — it changed my life profoundly."

The true challenge for Martin and the one that has propelled his life ever since was how to carry that experience back to the disengaged students at home who needed it so badly. When he and his colleagues returned, Martin talked the school system into letting him apply for a grant to fund a pilot school.

The result was a program called Stepping Stone, a predecessor of Oasis that resided, like most of its students, on St. Petersburg's south side. Each school year, then and now, begins with a week-long canoe trip up the Withlacoochee River for students, Martin and staff.

"It's that trip that bonds the children and ourselves in a way that nothing else could. We are a community. If we mess around and don't store the food right and the raccoons get it, we all go hungry. The consequences of actions are very clear — there's no store around the corner."

But the wilderness, says Martin, is more than just hard lessons. It's medicine for the soul. "Nature is therapeutic in ways that a classroom can't duplicate." But the trips are just one part of the program. In the classroom, the students get regular academic tutoring five days a week.

Despite Martin's best efforts, however, Stepping Stone was ready to fold for lack of resources in the late 1980s. It struggled to stay alive for several more years, and then the program caught the eye of Campus Dean Bill Heller.

Heller offered the school free quarters at USF St. Petersburg, where the program was reborn in 1995 as Oasis. The stability and respectability USF brings to the program are enormous, Martin says.

"There's so much prestige for the Oasis students in being a part of the university community. They carry this pride back to their neighborhoods (saying) 'I go to school down at USF!' It makes higher education a reality to them, not just a dream or a concept. They see it every day when they come to the campus for school."

Martin credits Heller for reaching out to Oasis and the community.

An advocate of university/community partnerships, Heller declines to take much credit for his part in helping the program. It is simply, he says, a case of the university doing the right thing.

"Too often, institutions of higher learning claim to have all the answers for schools as to how they should work, but these same institutions don't want to risk being held accountable for the answers they've offered," Heller says. "Oasis is the perfect chance for us to validate all the things we teach. And it's working."

Martin and Heller hope that many of Oasis's students will someday return to enroll at USF. "If we do our job right," declares Heller, "some of them are bound to be back."

Actually, the chances of that look good. Some 85 percent of Oasis alumni go on to graduate from high school, and some go on to college. Just ask Preston Wade, one of the program's first students who now is a senior at De Pauw University in Indiana.

"I was a withdrawn kid — kind of antisocial, they said. A dreamer, into myself. After Oasis, it seemed that I just grew up. My mom always says it just turned me completely around."

Of course Wade, who will pursue a Ph.D. in Far East studies when he graduates, is still a dreamer of big dreams. And so is Martin. His goal is to see Oasis expand to include sixth and seventh grades and high school. Launching the students back into public school after one year is a terrific act of faith for the Oasis staff.

"Our children and our parents have had some great experiences here. But when we leave the top of the mountain, it's so easy to drift back, to take back our old shapes, and to lose the enthusiasm and magic."

It's been 23 years since Martin came out of the wilderness a changed man, but the magic is still there. — Jacque Bishop

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The Ethics Center will try to raise funds and support from the community to expand the program to all grades throughout Pinellas schools. Huntley especially wants everyone involved with schools — bus drivers, principals, office staff and cafeteria workers — to buy into the concept. All would serve as good character role models and help create a positive environment for students. But the wilderness, says Martin, is more than just hard lessons. It's medicine for the soul. "Nature is therapeutic in ways that a classroom can't duplicate." But the trips are just one part of the program. In the classroom, the students get regular academic tutoring five days a week.

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Donors and campus create new opportunities

“There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success than to take the lead in introducing a new order of things.”
— Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson could easily have been describing the changes taking place on campus for the past four years. I’ve only been here for two short months, yet it’s very apparent that this campus is at the vanguard of bringing about a new order of things. This year is particularly significant in the life of USF St. Petersburg.

In all probability 1997 will be a year when USF accelerates its momentum and launches its most ambitious effort to raise its sights as an institution of higher learning and vibrant partner in our surrounding community.

The campus possesses the best features of a major research university, while preserving the intimacy of a small college. This dynamic combination helps graduates meet the demands of the world with competence, ethics, creativity, flexibility and confidence.

Today, donors are mission-oriented. They are motivated by ideas, not by dollar signs. Donors are interested in what an institution seeks to achieve and how it benefits their community.

Questions frequently asked include: Why was the institution founded? If it didn’t exist, would it be founded today? What is its role in the community and why should it remain viable and grow in strength?

Now is the time to answer these questions, examine possibilities and pursue opportunities.

This is an exciting time in the life of USF St. Petersburg and we need the help of everyone to realize its fullest potential. Please join in making 1997 a productive and memorable year!

Lee Mikell is the new Director of Advancement at USF St. Petersburg. He formerly served as development director at Millikin University in Decatur III, and at Louisiana State University.

Join us for
Blues on the Bayou
at USF St. Petersburg, harborside
Saturday, April 12 at noon
featuring blues music and cajun food!
call 893-9561 for details
A USF Pinellas County Alumni Chapter event