

Program to focus on Boca Raton's 'Hometown' history

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Imagine fourth-graders learning about renowned architect Addison Mizner and his influence on Boca Raton. Imagine the students designing their own miniature city after the lesson. Some students would create buildings. Some would make monuments and statues.

The Junior League of Boca Raton wants to make that a reality with the help of the Boca Raton Historical Society and the Boca Raton Museum of Art. The three groups are working together on the pilot of a local history program in early 2007 at the Youth Activity Center in suburban Boca Raton, where after-school and summer programs are held. And they want to introduce that program into public schools in Boca Raton by the fall of 2007.

The Hometown Histories project would teach kids about important points in Boca Raton's history. The hands-on lessons would take a closer look at topics such as the Boca Raton Army Air Field or Africa USA, which was a 177-acre botanical garden and cageless zoo that was in Boca from 1953 to 1961.

The Junior League is paying for the project. The nonprofit group with 700 members last year budgeted \$12,500 for the project and used the money to buy supplies.

Some of those supplies include two Boca Raton history books, *A Stroll Through Boca Raton's Early History From A to •* and *Images of America: Boca Raton*, which they will give teachers.

The organization's 2006-'07 budget for the project is \$5,000, said the group's president, Kathy Adkins.

The Hometown Histories project is a great idea that the school district supports, said Heather McCarroll, an instructional specialist with the district.

"The fourth-grade social studies curriculum focuses on Florida history," she said. "This is an innovative way to enhance the state standards to allow the Boca-area students to learn about the history that took place in their community."

But in order to be successful, the Junior League committee working on the Hometown Histories project knows that the fourth-grade presentations must be interesting.

"Social studies tends to be one of those topics that kids roll their eyes at," said Jennifer Robertson, co-chair of the Junior League committee.

Robertson, who taught fourth grade for 10 years in California, has a master's degree in curriculum instruction. She is helping to write the curriculum for the Hometown Histories program.

"We want fourth-graders to understand Boca Raton history," Robertson said. "It's about how Boca got to be what it is today."

The Boca Raton Historical Society prepared the research for the committee. Now, the committee is reviewing the research to write a curriculum. Some lessons will contain math, language and writing assignments that teachers can use after the League members make their presentations to the class.

The museum is creating art projects to go with the lessons.

"It will hold in their memory much better if there's a tangible component as they learn about Boca history," said Claire Clum, the museum's curator of education.

The project is one that will benefit kids, said Laurie-Lynn Jones, director of education at the Boca Raton Historical Society.

"The historical society believes that students who know and understand their own local history develop stronger community awareness and community pride, which in turn develops good citizenship skills," Jones said.

Jones and the Junior League hope the project will become a model for other communities.

"We're hoping this will become a template that other people in other cities can do," Jones said.