



CLEVELAND POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE

Our police officers helping today's youth become tomorrow's citizens

What goes around comes around --- when we're lucky. In his youth, Bob Kumazac was a kid from West 25th Street and Alton Avenue. He and his pals loved sports the way grass loves rain and sun. Wherever they could map out a field, they played baseball and football. Cleveland winters discourage even the hardiest of kids, and it was into rec centers for basketball.

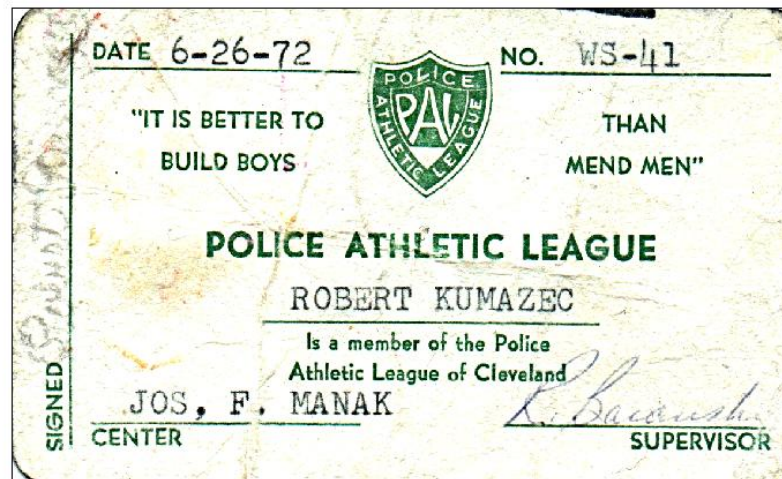
A block from the Kumazac home was an old fire station, abandoned and given to the Police Athletic League (PAL). Inside that old brick building, Cleveland police officers had created a haven for kids like Kumazac and his pals. There was a uniformed officer there watching and talking with the neighborhood kids and there was plenty to do, as well. Ping-pong, pool, basketball. (Kumazac still has his PAL

membership card from 1972.)

PAL's Cleveland history is notable. The program was a favorite of Safety Director Eliot Ness and the mission then is the mission now:

Provide kids with

opportunity to learn and enjoy themselves in a safe and friendly atmosphere. No easy task, but turning a kid from life on the street is worth all the effort.



He still has his membership card!

Today it is Cleveland Police Sgt. Bob Kumazac and he is the executive director of PAL. From 1990 to 1998, he served on the gang unit.

What he learned on the streets couldn't be taught in any class. He watched and listened and counseled kids whose backgrounds put them on the wrong path. He arrested a great many of them, as well. A common refrain from kids was, "Why are you harassing us?" That question stuck in the officer's mind.

"When you arrested gang members, some were hard and had hard lives and did bad things. But there were lots of kids who weren't bad, but they had no one in their lives who cared about them, who could provide guidance."

Kumazac saw what a reenergized PAL might do for the kids but PAL had slowed considerably over the years and wasn't able to fulfill its original mission. As a PAL trustee, he wrote grant applications, encouraged other officers to volunteer their time and skills, and made sure PAL's kids were exposed to this idea: "There are adults who care about you, who want you to grow up and be successful."

He manages a smorgasbord of programs, all run on shoestrings. Funding is always problematic. But a former PAL kid said 'thank you' in a surprising and wonderful way. NFL star Nate Clements sent a check for \$21,000. Funds come from donations, foundations and anti-gang federal and state project money that trickles down.

Money is one thing; manpower is another. PAL succeeds because fifty PAL officers and a hundred coaches and volunteers spend their time with the kids. Kumazac said, "These are the people who aren't going to be thanked by the public, but each of them knows how valuable their contributions are and I know it, and the kids know it, too."

Thanks to them, there are swimming programs, a football program that includes cheerleaders (and prepares kids to play at schools such as Benedictine and Glenville), ping pong and pool, plus a few programs that surprise: line dancing and hair cutting. "We offer what officers can offer," Kumazac said. "Every kid likes something, but if they're not exposed to it, they're not going to know."

There's so much more for them than hanging out on street corners." Pal officers and a hundred coaches and volunteers ... 50PAL

Empirical evidence of PAL's influence is hard to come by, he said. Data on crime is easily accessible, but counting the kids whose lives have been changed by PAL, by hanging out and talking with Cleveland police officers, is impossible.

Still, Kumazac had no doubt PAL's efforts are rewarded every day. "It's the difference between patching a leaking boat, which I call suppression, and making sure the boat doesn't leak before it leaves the dock, and I call that prevention."

As a street cop who hunted and arrested gang members and now offers kids the opportunities to see beyond the street corner, who would now better than Sgt. Kumazac?



**I think a PAL
program would be
great for the kids in
Cleveland!**

← Eliot Ness