

Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right. — Oprah Winfrey

THE PLAIN DEALER

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HEROES 2009 ¶ Northeast Ohioans do extraordinary things. ¶ Join us as we recognize some of the people who make Greater Cleveland a better place to live. ¶ The contributions of our 2009 community heroes — many nominated by Plain Dealer readers — represent the good works performed every day by thousands of our neighbors. Thank you, to each and every one.



LONNIE TIMMONS III | THE PLAIN DEALER

Cleveland police Sgt. Bob Kumazec gives instructions to Police Explorers Antonio Ealom and Ricardo Jackson, who were portraying Mickey and Minnie Mouse during the 2nd District Police Athletic League community Christmas party.

Cleveland policeman hopes to reach youths through sports

GABRIEL BAIRD
Plain Dealer Reporter

When Cleveland police Sgt. Bob Kumazec was in middle school, he spent his afternoons playing sports and shooting pool at the Cleveland Police Athletic League recreation center near his home on West 25th Street.

Although he eventually outgrew playing at the center, he never forgot it. Now he is the executive director of the league.

“He just wants the best for the kids of the city of Cleveland,” said his brother, Kevin Kumazec.

After he graduated from high school, Bob Kumazec went to Cleve-

HELPING THE POOR: The busy director of a Berea ministry always finds the time. **A12**

land State University, where he got a bachelor's degree in psychology and then a master's degree in public administration.

Then, in 1985, he became a Cleveland police officer.

When the department started a gang unit in 1990, he was one of the original members.

“That was when the gang problem was really big, when the gangs from Chicago and Los Angeles were trying to infiltrate Cleveland,” he said.

SEE SPORTS | **A12**

Trying to reach youths through sports

The position put him in contact with a lot of youths who were getting into trouble and would complain that the only time they saw police, it was to arrest them.

“This isn't the time for a hug,” Kumazec would tell them.

But his conscience nagged him.

“I felt bad because I knew they had a chance if somebody would help them,” he said. “Most of the kids weren't really bad kids, they just did bad things. I think they were bored because they had nothing to do.”

Kumazec looked into the Police Athletic League. The league, which famous lawman Eliot Ness brought to Cleveland in 1956, was having tough times financially and was a shadow of what it had been when he was young.

Kumazec joined the board. PAL had a lot of debts. It sold its buildings. Kumazec succeeded in getting some grants.

PAL also has used its funds to run the Police Explorers as well as football and boxing programs along with equipment needed for the athletes.

“It teaches them discipline and sportsmanship and a lot of life lessons,” Kumazec said.

He said that the league serves about 10,000 kids a year.

In the last few years, funding has been tight.

“It's very difficult to get donations nowadays because of the economy,” he said.