

## **Inspired by Vietnam Vet, McKeesport's TFIM Team Used a Local Recycling Campaign for International Outreach**

McKeesport Area School District's TFIM team took the theme from last year's Student Leadership Conference—*Act Locally, Think Globally*—over the top this year, with three projects aimed at helping kids a half a world away. To 'act locally' they mounted a clean-up project, collecting discarded digital cameras, cell phones and ink cartridges. They recycled the electronic gear and used proceeds to fund scholarships and school supplies for *Paul's Kids Vietnam Children's Charities*. They also made donations toward the Save-a-Life program the charity sponsors.

Paul's Kids is a non-profit organization founded by Vietnam veteran Paul Pinkerton. Among other things that have put it in headlines was the adoption of a Vietnamese orphan Pinkerton helped orchestrate for Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie. The organization's mission is helping needy Vietnamese children, particularly orphans with little chance of adoption. The charity's projects focus on improving living conditions, medical care, educational opportunities, and overall quality of life.

As part of their Peer-to Peer project, the TFIM team invited Pinkerton to talk to McKeesport high school students about his career journey and how he turned his passion for the plight of Vietnamese kids into an international organization. Pinkerton, who also spoke at the high school's annual Community and Career Fair, shared photos from the orphanages he supports and from the Vietnam War. The students and community not only got a chance to talk to Pinkerton, but also to a Vietnamese orphan and a family from Elizabeth who adopted her with his help.

To help Paul's Kids, the TFIM team members did individual projects, taking their recycling effort to businesses and community organizations, talking at each about TFIM and their passion for acting locally and thinking globally. They also sponsored a blue jeans day for teachers and sought their contributions, either in recyclables or \$5.00 donations. They made posters to hang throughout the high school; made patches for teachers to wear to show their support for the TFIM project and to recognize their contributions; and collected from fellow students, encouraging participation with a \$50 gift card for the one bringing in the most recyclables.

To engage with younger students, the TFIM team did similar outreach in the middle school. They spoke to all 8<sup>th</sup> grade homerooms, asking them also to recycle to help fund education for a Vietnamese peer. The top 10 contributors from the middle school can also look forward to a reward: they'll get to 'move up' to be McKeesport High School students for a day, meeting future teachers, shadowing TFIM participants, getting some gifts to take home from the school's shop classes and having a lunch that the school's Culinary Arts students prepare.

"Doing a community service, while reaching out to kids in another country has been an incredible experience for our TFIM team," said TFIM advisor Kelly Mursch. "It's really been inspiring for everyone."

Pinkerton has put McKeesport's efforts on his web site. The TFIM team also encourages anyone who wants more information about Paul's Kids to go to his at [www.PaulsKids.org](http://www.PaulsKids.org)

Meanwhile, the TFIM team is getting ready for another community service project. They'll be participating in *Hands-On Pittsburgh* on May 1.