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A message good for everyone

By: Amanda Falcone , Staff

MERIDEN - About 80 teenagers attended the mayor's annual teen summit Tuesday to listen to motivational speaker Ed Gerety.

Gerety, of New Hampshire, used humor and storytelling to captivate his audience during an hour-long presentation on leadership, gratitude, respect and responsibility.

The event was held at the Augusta Curtis Cultural Center.

"The message was good for everyone to hear - even me," Mayor Mark D. Benigni said.

Angelica Espada, a 15-year-old Wilcox Technical High School student, was particularly touched by one story Gerety told about a girl whose boyfriend died of alcohol poisoning.



Dave Zajac / Record-Journal

"I was getting emotional about the girl who lost her boyfriend," Espada said.

As Gerety shared story after story, his message was clear to his teenage audience: Treat people with respect and live life with gratitude. People make choices that affect lives forever, he added.

"Every choice and decision we make has consequences we are responsible for," Gerety said.

Being a teenager today is not easy, and it is sometimes a challenge to be respectable and compassionate, Gerety said.

The biggest mistake people make is when they are not themselves, and it is important to treat people with respect just because, he said.

"What we give out comes back," Gerety said. "The ripple effect goes on and on and on."

Gerety's presentation ended with an interactive activity - something Luis Fuentes, 14, a student at Lincoln Middle School, said he enjoyed the most.

Those at the Curtis Cultural Center worked together to create the sounds of a rainstorm.

Aside from enjoying Gerety's interactive presentation, Fuentes said he learned a lesson.

"You have to appreciate the things you have," he said.

Besides enjoying food and the presentation, each teen took home a signed copy of one of Gerety's books, "Combinations: Opening the Door to Student Leadership."

Benigni said the mayor's teen summit was an initiative he began six years ago because he wanted to support Meriden's youth as leaders.

The event is sponsored and paid for by the Meriden-Wallingford Substance Abuse Council and the city's Youth Services Department.

"The goal is to deliver a positive message to our teen leaders," Benigni said.

The mayor ended Tuesday's summit by wishing the teenagers well.

"Best of luck with the rest of the school year," he told them. "Make sure you finish strong. Grades are important."