

'MoMs'

reach out

WNY high school students spread love through charities

By Lana Rose Diaz
 Reporter staff writer

West New York teenager Steven Ramirez will always remember the sound of one special voice. It came from a man in a bread line in New York, and it was raised above all the others. But it wasn't crying out or begging; rather it was lifted up in joyous song.

Ramirez, a junior at Memorial High School, recalled his shock at the operatic voice of a man who had only the clothes on his back. He heard the man when he sang carols at a bread line over the holidays with the "MoMs."

"MoMs," or My Outreach Mission, has close to 300 members at Memorial High School and performs volunteer work throughout the year, including helping out at soup kitchens, orphanages, the Bowery Mission Transitional Center in New York City (the largest facility for the homeless in New York), and food and clothing drives.

The student group is an offshoot from the Fransiscan Community Development Group in Fairview, which does its charitable work in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi: quietly and away from recognition.

Although the students come from a spectrum of religious identities, they all proudly sport sweatshirts with one of St. Francis' messages, "Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

The spirit of the MoMs mission spread quickly throughout the school and community since the group's creation last year. Many students join because they see others doing the work and want to know how they can help.

"It sounded cool," said Laura Hannon, a junior. "You get to go places and experience everything."

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But once they begin the work themselves, it sticks with them.

"We're trying to help and bring awareness to issues like poverty," said the group's president, Jose Pozo, a senior. "If they see other kids doing it, they want to join. This is some-

thing I want to do for the rest of my life."

Most of the students have been especially touched by missions like the bread line, the Bowery, and a nursing home, where they're able to see who they're helping.



The West N Edwin Sosa, a senior, said he helped out at the bread line on one of the coldest days of the year in his North Face coat, while those receiving the bag lunches were only in sweaters. It had a profound effect on him. "You always hear about people in hunger," said Sosa. "But you don't always see it."

Sophomore Steven Jeanty added that seeing hunger on the faces of others has altered the way he acts at his own dinner table. "When [you've seen] someone do something drastic for food," said Jeanty, "it makes you think about other people."

Sowing seeds for the future

At the core of the large group of students are approximately 20 advisors who come from all areas within the school.

Teacher Sue Colacurcio, who is also involved with the Fransiscan center in Fairview, said the missions help give significance to community service and "put the humanitarian back in the human."

In addition to teachers, many others have volunteered to help out including guidance counselors, office administra-

~~tors, and even the school nurse.~~ Although the traditional notion of an advisor is to be "the adult in the room," the MoMs advisors said they have been inspired by the dedication and energy of the new generation.

"This generation knows commitment to other people," said Lenore Murray, the school nurse. "There's such an enthusiasm, it's almost like a hunger."

Teacher Maria Blanco said the students function more like a family than a group, and the others agreed.

"One of the things I find amazing is how well they work as a unit," said Linda Monforte, a guidance counselor. "It's a beautiful thing."

The students involved in the group are hesitant to receive any glory for the work they are conducting throughout the community on their very full calendar of events. Rather, they prefer to focus on the mission at hand.

"It's just something we love doing," said Kevin Avila, a senior.

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Upcoming projects

Upcoming events for the MoMs include helping out with a cerebral palsy foundation, packing up items for Haiti relief, and attending a New Jersey Devils game with the proceeds going to the Rebecca Vereia Foundation. The foundation was created after Vereia, an area teenager, was killed in a driving accident after a graduation party. She was a passenger in a car driven by her friend. The Foundation is based in West New York and promotes towards safe teen driving.

The MoM-s were recognized last November by the Bergen County United Way Housing for their volunteer efforts in helping 22 homeless people, some who had been displaced by a residential fire, move into permanent homes.

For more information about the Memorial High School MoMs, contact (201) 553-4124. ☐

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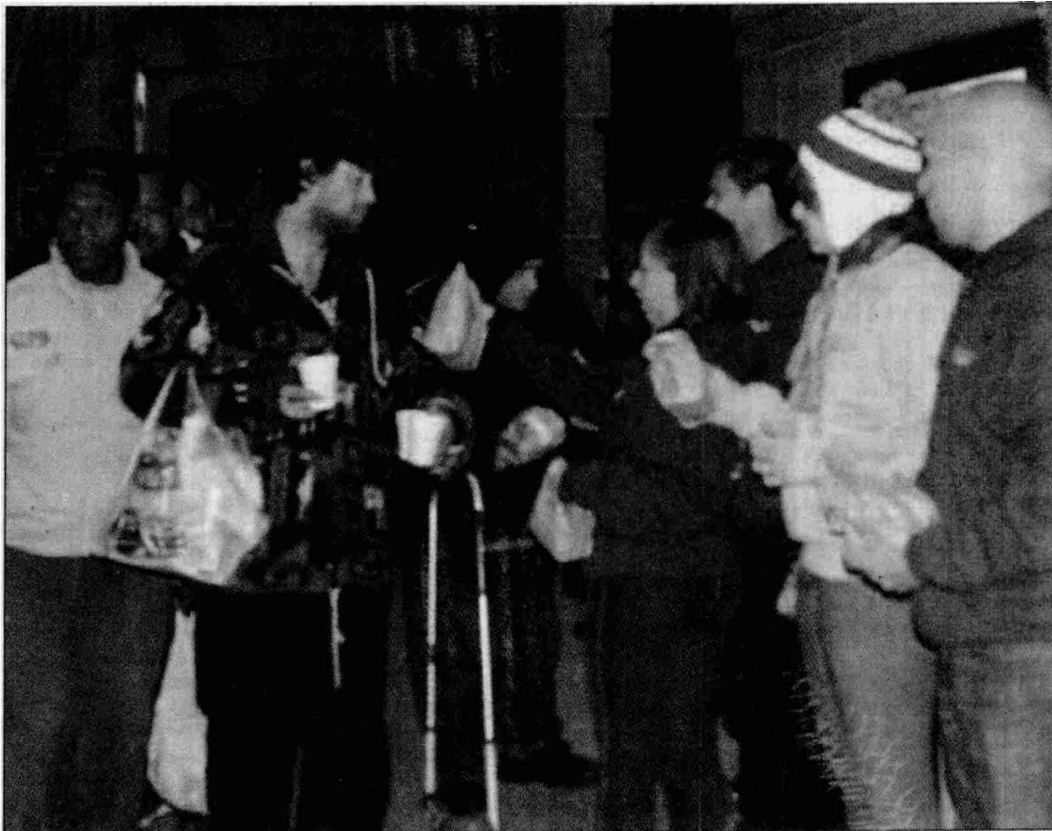
“This is something I want to do for the rest of my life.” – Jose Pozo



HELP FOR THE HOLIDAYS – Students from Memorial High School’s “MoMs” group helped out last year at the Bowery Mission Transitional Center in New York City.



SAFE DRIVING – Jose Pozo and Maria Menendez show support for the Rebecca Vere Foundation, which focuses on the mission of safe teen driving.



IT IS IN GIVING THAT WE RECEIVE – “MoMs” pass out bagged lunches at a bread line where they volunteer throughout the year.