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UT booster club honored by state

By Robin J. Youngblood, ryoungblood@qconline.com.

Without its booster club, United Township High School would be much less.

The Illinois State Board of Education apparently agrees. The UT Booster Club has been honored in the "team" category after district superintendent Barbara Suelter nominated the group for the state board's "Those Who Excel" award.

Today's booster club has been nearly 20 years in the making. In 1987, parent support groups united to show their support for the school and formed the booster club.

"The impetus, per the by-laws, for the booster club was to serve as a vehicle for financial assistance to extracurricular activities," Mr. Suelter wrote in her nomination, "and therefore, allow the district finances to focus on the educational program. Because of this support, the district has been able to provide a broader range of extracurricular activities for its students."

The UT club raises about \$100,000 or more each year -- equal to more than 3,000 volunteer hours, according to the nomination, About 500 people commit to be a booster and volunteer at one time or another during the year.

With the money the group raises, it has paid for numerous things, large and small, throughout the district. Booster dollars help buy band instruments, outfits for sports teams, a timing system for the pool, a public address system, welcome signs for the school and spirit banners. The group also gave money to expand the music education wing.

The group raises dollars through a long list of activities, such as manning the concession stand during athletic events, holding a fall craft show and operating a parking lot for the John Deere Classic. Group members also operate concessions for city fireworks, Tugfest and Concert in the Park.

Also under the club's wing is the Panther Shop, a fundraiser gala, Project Prom and Project Graduation.

"Words that describe the booster club are tireless, energetic, dedicated, hardworking and motivated," said Bob Feller, a UT coach, adviser and teacher.

"The UTHS Booster Club will try anything, any time and at any place," said former state senator Denny Jacobs

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of East Moline. "The members, over a period of years, have proven to be very creative and very professional in their approach, not only in fundraising but in the hard work necessary to assist our young students in all their endeavors."

Former principal Gordon Cornelius said the club isn't just for sports -- it has helped all parts of UT.

"UTHS athletes and all extra-curricular activities have benefited from the continued strong leadership teams," he said. "Members are willing to do whatever it takes. Parents of band members will sell food at soccer games and theater parents will help raise money for a weight room."

Ms. Suelter said she doesn't know what UT would do without its booster club. "I don't know if I could imagine that," she said. "We just wouldn't have any extracurricular activities if it wasn't for the boosters."

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