



## Director enjoys working with youths

by Mary Rupert

When 28 youths graduated Oct. 23 from the YouthBuild program in Kansas City, Kansas, Gil Castro was like the coach of a winning team.

Castro, the new director of the YouthBuild program in Kansas City, Kansas, has been working with the program for the past year as job developer and placement specialist. He draws upon his many years of experience as a coach in his new job as director.

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YouthBuild, a 10-month training and education program for undereducated and underemployed youths 16 to 24 years old, is funded by the Department of Labor. Those in the program split their time between construction and training sites, Castro said.

"We help them get their GED or diploma," he said. "We teach them skills, get involved in community service work. We also are an affiliate of AmeriCorps."

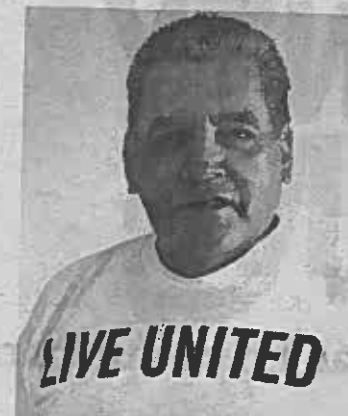
United Way is a sponsor of YouthBuild here. Adam MacDonald, community relations manager of the United Way of Wyandotte County, said Castro is replacing Victor Hernandez as the director. Hernandez has accepted a position as administrative coordinator with the Kansas City, Kansas, Housing Authority.

"We want to help undereducated youth in Wyandotte County and give them other options," MacDonald said.

Currently, YouthBuild participants here are involved with construction, and have built two homes for Heartland Habitat for Humanity, in addition to spending time in the classroom toward receiving a GED.

Once the youths amass hundreds of hours of community service, they may receive grants for secondary education at a trade school or community college, Castro said.

The trainees are participating in



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the program about 30 hours a week, he said. Besides skills training, they are learning life skills, financial literacy and other training to help them succeed.

A retiree from the Unified Government's mapping department, Castro has served on a number of boards throughout the community, including the Family Conservancy, the United Way, El

Centro and the Wyandotte County Sports Association. He has lived in Wyandotte County all his life and is a member of St. Patrick's Church.

Castro said he has always enjoyed getting to be part of young people's lives and shaping their character. As his children were growing up, Castro coached girls' and boys' sports.

"The rewards are so large years later," he said. Many of the students he coached long ago now come up to him, thank him and tell him how much their team experiences meant to them, he said.

"And that gives you a lot of gratification," he said. "I think athletics obviously is great. It's good for character building."

He likes to talk about perseverance being necessary in sports and life. As coaches know, everyone is different and the coach's job is to bring them together and to maximize the efforts, he said.

"And the winning - that will take care of itself," Castro said.

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