

K-Kids help bring ailing kids to U.S.

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Tuscola fourth graders are holding a fund-raiser aimed at helping improve the health of other children.

The students are part of a group called K-Kids. The group is sponsored by the Tuscola Kiwanis and members perform all kinds of community projects throughout the course of their fourth grade year.

The fund-raiser, dubbed Party In A Can, is to raise money for the local chapter and families participating in Children of Chernobyl.

The program, Children of Chernobyl, brings Belarussian children affected by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of 1986 to the U.S. for the summer.

Their brief time in the U.S. has great health benefits for them. The children spend six weeks with a host family and have access to clean air and water, good food and are able to build up their immune systems.

Marylee McGee, of Newman, started the Illinois chapter after she decided to bring a child over. Angelina, now 15, has been spending summers with the McGee family since she was 6 years old.

"What I have learned from this is that it doesn't matter if they are well-to-do children, they still get their immune system cleaned," McGee said. "Whether rich or poor, that won't happen unless they get away from their country."

Last year the K-Kids raised more than \$800.

"It was so wonderful to have," McGee said.

The money helped pay the \$400 for the interpreter, who must accompany the children on the 22-hour flight. That is the minimum amount for an interpreter, McGee said.

It also helped pay the \$191 in medical insurance for two host families. Most of the children's medical expenses are donated by area doctors.

"Party in a Can was created by Marylee McGee when she began the whole fund-raising process for the Children of Chernobyl (at Tuscola)," said Beth Reifsteck, fourth grade teacher and K-Kids sponsor. "When she came to our district she approached me with the idea of having the K-Kids help out and our current Board of Student Representatives thought it was a good idea and fit with our mission. So, last year we held the first Party in a Can fund-raiser."

Each class at North Ward Elementary School receives a snack food of some kind in a can. The class eats the snack, and then fills the can with money. Every classroom will collect for two weeks this month. After an assembly on Jan. 17 they will begin collecting and will continue until Jan. 31.

The top three classrooms will be rewarded with an ice cream party.

"Students did have a fun time with it last year and we tried to keep a running total so students could see where their

class ranked," Reifsteck said. "This year we are going to have a whole-school kickoff and have all the K-Kid reps explain the program and try to encourage the students to bring in their allowances."

If anyone would like to donate they can drop a donation off at the office addressed to the K-Kids or send it to school with a North Ward student to put in his or her class can.



Above, 15 children affected by the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster were able to come to the U.S. from Belarus to build up their immune systems over the summer.