

## GIVING BACK

BY KAREN BOUGHTON SIEGELMAN

Statistics indicate that credit unions are the financial institutions of choice for one out of every four Americans, so the staff and board of the Advantage Federal Credit Union could just sit back and be satisfied with this popularity.

However instead of waiting for community members to come to them to make the most of the many services they offer, this local not-for-profit organization reaches out to its neighbors.

Advantage Credit Union's mission is "people helping people", and since the 1930's when the roots of this credit union were established, it has been committed to improving its members' financial standing, as well as enhancing the quality of other aspects of their life.

Advantage, which opened its fifth branch this past fall, serves the employees and others associated with the University of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, Rochester General Hospital and Highland Hospital.

"We are owned by our members and governed by a volunteer board," said Jeff Bocach, President/CEO of Advantage Federal Credit Union. "Our mission is to give back to our members."

The ways that Advantage extends a helping hand to its members and their families are varied and abundant. Many of its outreach activities have an educational focus because of the groups they serve.

Advantage is involved in programs that teach financial responsibility. The credit union has formed a special partnership with Rochester City School District's School #4. Bocach serves on the school's planning team, attends assemblies and even volunteered to be a dance partner for some of the school's students at last year's St. Valentine's Day event.

In addition piggy banks are distributed to students at the school and the youngsters are instructed on the benefits of saving money. The students' parents also are invited to improve their financial knowledge by attending the

## Advantage Federal Credit Union invests in the community

school's Parent Academy. Advantage staff members conduct money management classes for the parents who enroll in this 10-week program.

"We teach budgeting, financial planning and the mechanics of opening accounts and dealing with credit issues," said Bocach. "We help the parents decipher between their needs and wants."

Diane Miller, Director of Marketing/Business Development for Advantage, said the credit union's relationship with School #4 is unique and exciting because both Bocach and the school's principal "think outside the box".

Advantage has a special relationship with Franklin High School as well. For the past eight years this city school has housed a branch of the credit union, with students

serving as the employees.

Bocach mentioned that one of the former Franklin High School students who helped run this branch of the credit union several years ago is now the head teller at Advantage's newly-opened branch located on Buffalo Road in Gates.

"She is our success story," commented Bocach, "and we have many other students from the Franklin branch who have worked at our other locations at different times during their high school and college careers."

Advantage also had committed time and money to the Spencerport School District. Bocach has been on the district's School to Work Advisory Council for 13 years and for the past two years Advantage has contributed funds to launch the school's Robotics team.

Bocach and his staff also invest their time and resources to a number of other causes. Advantage is one of the sponsors of a radiothon that raises money for the Golisano Children's Hospital annually, and each holiday its employees choose a different charity to support.

"We ask the staff to suggest organizations that they would like to help out," said Bocach. "Once we choose the charity the staff spends their own money to buy gifts for the cause."

A unique partnership also exists between Advantage, the University of Rochester and the city of Rochester called the 3 plus 3 plus 3 program. It provides first-time homebuyers who qualify with \$9,000 toward the purchase of a house in certain areas of the city.

"Thirty people have taken advantage of this program so far," commented Bocach. "It helps increase property values and is a great way to encourage people to invest in the city."

With every investment in the community Advantage Federal Credit Union is "always trying to do the right thing," said Bocach.

"We do not want to hang onto status quo," he added. "We want to succeed and grow, along with our members and the community."



submitted photo

Kirby, Advantage Federal Credit Union's mascot, spends some time with students from Rochester City School District School #4.