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DEBBY ROSS/Itemizer Observer

The Morgans, an all-volunteer family, laugh easily and often. They are Teri, from left, Jenifer, 18, Whitney, 13, Mike, 16, Tyler, 10 and Dale.

Morgans dedicated to hometown pride

By DEBBY ROSS
of the Itemizer Observer

DALLAS — Spend an hour with the Morgans and you'll notice a couple of things right away. They laugh easily and often and they don't sit around and whine. All the Morgans are tireless volunteers.

"I don't think we're that unusual, there's just a lot of us," said mom Teri Morgan. Teri is a youth treatment therapist for county mental health.

Mike, 16, and Tyler, 10, have led the family's three-year effort to raise money to build a skateboard park here. The kids, along with their fellow skaters, all members of Youth for Dallas Skatepark, have raised more than \$10,000. They've done it with car washes, concerts, can and bottle drives and raffles. A number of adults plus members of the Dallas Kiwanis Club, Dallas Action Together and the City of Dallas are sponsoring the effort as well.

"I just like to skate and I wanted to get the skatepark built so I'd have some place to go," Mike said.

The city council approved the skatepark design last month and Teri Morgan, who coordinates her family's efforts, said she expects ground will be broken this fall at the site adjacent to the new Dallas Aquatic Center.

Patience — that's what Tyler has learned from his first volunteering experience. Three years is a long time for a 10-year-old.

The skatepark effort is just one of the family's volunteer activities.

Dale is a musician in addition to his job as a field investigator/mediator for the construction contractors board. He works with the choir programs at Dallas High School and LaCreole Middle

“ Don't just complain.
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TERI MORGAN

School and plays music at his church and for other community events. He coaches soccer for KIDS, Inc.

Dale and Mike traveled to Prescott, Ariz. in June to work on a Habitat for Humanity house. Mike said he's been helping his dad build pole barns for several years so he was no stranger to construction technique. He even learned to balance a sledgehammer on his head, added Teri as she showed off her favorite picture from the guys' trip.

Jenifer just finished her first year of school at the University of Oregon. When she was in high school here she was the youngest recipient of the "Children First for Oregon" award for her outstanding service to children in the community. She is cofounder of the Coalition for Violence Prevention, a local group that provides mentoring programs for at-risk youth.

"I worked with a lot of people I wouldn't normally have chosen to hang out with but this group brought us all together and we got things accomplished," Jenifer said.

It all started for Jenifer during the media blitz after DHS student Matt Sexton killed his parents in 1998. Jenifer wasn't comfortable with the media's portrayal of her hometown.

"I told her, 'You live here, do something about it,'" Teri said.

Behind the Scenes

"It's just a natural human thing to want to help people," Jenifer said. "Volunteering helps you get out of your little box. People tell themselves, 'I'm only going to hang out with this group.' Volunteering breaks you out of that and makes you push your boundaries and makes you get uncomfortable. It builds character."

"She's heard that from us a lot," Teri said. "We're just a family of action."

Animals are 13-year-old Whitney's passion. This is her first year participating in 4-H and she came in first in all her categories at pre-fair this year.

Her 4-H group, Pony Expressions has planted trees at the fairgrounds and is raising money to make improvements to the arena.

"We do things as a group and we help the shy kids to get more involved with a buddy system," Whitney said.

She's excited about her next venture too. "I just found out I'm old enough to volunteer for the Humane Society. I'm going to do that; I just love animals," Whitney said.

Teri said she doesn't remember volunteering until she had a family. It started with baking cookies for class parties, "when you could still do that," she said.

"We just have a great time. It's something we can all jump in and do together. We've met a lot of great people and made so many good friends," Teri said.

"I tell them over and over," Teri said. "You live here. Don't just complain, do something about it."