

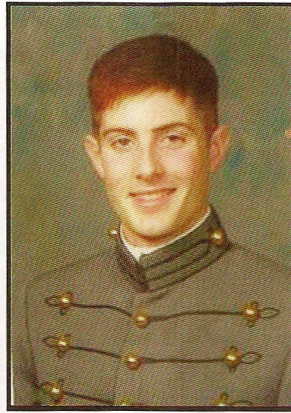
ASTRA Made A Leader Out Of Me

Brian McBee

ASTRA Club Past President

ASTRA Club of Pendleton, Oregon

Brian McBee was the Charter President for the ASTRA Club of Pendleton, sponsored by Altrusa International of Pendleton, Oregon, in 2005-2006. Brian graduated from Pendleton High School in 2007, and is now a cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Brian was named to the USMA Dean's List for the Fall Semester, and was chosen as one of twelve West Point cadets that will be traveling to Texas this spring to meet with Former President George Bush and other national leaders to learn about leadership in public office. While there is no ASTRA Club at West Point, Brian continues to use his leadership skills learned with ASTRA and volunteers regularly to help children whose military parents are serving overseas.



His speech that follows was given as the Keynote Address during the Governor's Banquet at the District Twelve District Conference last May to encourage the continued development of the ASTRA program.

"The youth of Pendleton were very fortunate in 2005 because that is the year that Altrusa International, Inc. of Pendleton founded the ASTRA Club of Pendleton. I was fortunate at that time to have been elected Charter President by my peers. Getting the ASTRA Club going with the Altrusans was an amazing experience. Word about the success of our Club spread quickly. Our Club size grew monthly, from 21 to over 80 members. I want you to know that I have truly benefited by being involved in ASTRA. In fact, I valued my experience in ASTRA so much that I chose to write one of my college essays this year about how ASTRA has impacted my development as a responsible citizen. I would like to share some of these thoughts with you.

I believe that four of the key components of the mission statement for Altrusa International of Pendleton are actually critical components for youth growing up. They are: promoting community service, developing leadership, fostering understanding, and encouraging fellowship. I also believe that an ASTRA Club is both an opportunity for making amazing memories and an incredibly valuable tool for positive development of youth.

Some of the best high school memories are directly related to the ASTRA Club. ASTRA provides leadership, skill and career training to students, and is a

bridge between the local Altrusan and high school students.

B.H. Lidell Hart once said that "History is a universal experience." Altrusa members have shared with students their experiences and knowledge resulting from their own personal histories. In my opinion, the passing on of knowledge and the commitment of time to our youth is one of the most necessary and important things that can occur in modern America. In an age when schools are in desperate need of money that is not to be found, it

is of special importance that outside influences pick up the baton and run with it.

Promoting Community Service

Supporting and stimulating youth to volunteer in their community is, in fact, a critical part of encouraging active citizenship. Albert Einstein has said that "The high destiny of the individual is to serve, rather than to rule." Teenagers definitely can contribute to the quality of life in a community through service. Many of us want the opportunity to serve, but we do not always know how to do it. Through ASTRA, Altrusans have given us tools that we can use for the rest of our lives. You have taught us how to examine needs in a community, to work out a way together to solve problems and meet those needs, to raise money and use our own elbow grease, and then to look at what we have done and think of how we can do it better next time.

In Pendleton's ASTRA Club, we have served Thanksgiving and Christmas meals, helped at a community health fair, placed flags at the cemetery each Memorial Day, helped tear down an old dilapidated hotel, bought gifts during the holidays for various families in need, planted trees, and even collected school supplies and sports equipment for poverty-stricken children in the new county of East Timor. Community service teaches responsible citizenship, and is an important habit for youth to develop.

Developing Leadership

It is often said that "learning by doing" is one of the best ways to master a new skill. In ASTRA, "learning by doing" not only teaches us skills, it helps us to become more effective in creating change in our commu-

nity. Aside from learning how a proper meeting is run Students in ASTRA learn how to organize projects from ideas, meet deadlines, take on the role of leader, and most importantly, we learn how we can make a difference. We can all make a difference. A good deed to a student will often assume the ripple effect and eventually lead to a wave of generosity throughout a school or community. This has certainly been the case in Pendleton where our Club is involved in about 20 different service projects and several fundraisers each year.

Fostering Understanding

There are young people such as myself living in different cities around the country, and around the world, that face many challenges. Fostering understanding between people of different ages, different cultures, different religions, and different abilities is critical. Despite the challenges and the differences, we all have many common threads. We have to believe in ourselves, to try to understand others, to care about current issues and our country, and to develop our own character well.

Last year, our ASTRA Club collected a huge number of donated school supplies and sports gear for students in East Timor. Our local Federal Express office discounted the shipping. We spent time finding out about East Timor, a small brand-new country northwest of Australia, near Indonesia. We had to itemize everyone of the hundreds of items we sent, so it would get through customs. We also sent some disposable cameras along with a note asking for some photots of when the kids in the capital city of Dili received the items. Two days after we had shipped the items, the headline world news story was of riots throughout East Timor, and the evacuation of all personnel from foreign countries. We found out, after several weeks, that our contact person had been evacuated, riots were still going on, and Fedex was holding all the donations in a warehouse in Timor. It took months for the turmoil to settle, and we never did get photos sent back, but we are sure that all those pencils and pads of paper, calculators, rulers, picture books, soccer balls, basketballs, and Frisbees are being put put to good use by some children in a country that none of us will probably ever visit. That was a great project for our Club. It taught us about a country we'd never heard of, made us realize that sometimes the best plans get messed up, and still allowed us to be hopeful of a benefit for some youth in another part of the world.

Many of you have dedicated hours to helping kids in some form or fashion, through ASTRA hours, through community service projects, speaking to youth about your career, or through things as simple as offering a student in need a piece of thoughtful advice. Many cyn-

ics today believe that advice and other words fall upon deaf ears with the modern teenager. I feel that I can speak for teens everywhere when I say that help IS appreciated. In fact, teenagers often will repeat, without recognizing the source, pieces of knowledge to their own friends that they picked up from a caring adult. You help us to understand the world in a better way. You help us to contribute to the world in a better way.

Encouraging Fellowship

Every teenager likes to feel special. We like to be part of something successful. We need to be understood and sometimes given direction, but we also need to do things ourselves and even to fail. We like to be thought of as adults, but we also still need to be kids. We need to work together, but we also need to play together. In high school, after a lot of hard work and planning, pizza parties and games are a great way to relax and have fun together. An important part of ASTRA is the fun, the games, the laughter, the meeting people that you never would have met any other way. ASTRA provides a student-run system for both leadership and fellowship.

In conclusion, on behalf of students everywhere, I would like to thank each of you for the kindness you exhibit. I would like to thank you for passing on your knowledge and committing your time to youth and to your communities. I especially want to thank all the Altrusans of Pendleton for your incredible support and belief in us for the past two years. Two weeks from tonight, I graduate from Pendleton High School. Five weeks from tonight, I will be on the eve of reporting to the US Military Academy at West Point. I am more prepared for my future challenges and leadership roles because of my ASTRA Club experiences in Pendleton. Tonight I ask each of you to continue helping kids in your community whenever the opportunity arises, so that the youth of today will mimic their elders and continue the Altrusan tradition of service and selflessness as we step forward to lead this great county. One of my favorite quotes is from Russell Crowe, and is very appropriate. "What you do in life echoes an eternity." I know the echo of Altrusa is already being heard. I hope you will also hear the echo of myself and my generation."