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New Boys & Girls Club director wants facility to be even more of a community resource

By kcleveand@cabinet.com >Kathy Cleveland
Staff Writer

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MILFORD – It's almost too simple – a walking club with about a dozen children and adults hiking two or three miles together around Milford.

But to Susan Taylor, the simple afternoon walks are part of what makes the Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley a very good thing for children.

Taylor is the club's new executive director and this is her fifth week at the new job.

She's excited about a program called "Triple Play" that will begin in the fall and focus on developing children's minds, bodies and characters.

Staff will be trained to be aware of healthy eating habits and various ways to put more physical activity into the day.

"Every program we have" can be involved, she said. Even the mandatory homework club can have some physical activity.

Afternoon walks fit well into the program.

"We are finding so much about (the children's) concerns," she said. "Just spending one-on-one time with them. They don't need answers" to their problems, just personal time and attention.

The 45-year-old mother of two lives in Milford with her husband, Andrew, and their children, Alex, 8, and Rachel, 12, who are club members.

Chosen from more than 70 applicants to replace former director Dave Parker, Taylor is not new to the club. She was hired in 2007 as part-time resource development director and is now doing both jobs until the club can find a part-time development/marketing associate.

She also has worked as a consultant for other area nonprofits, including the Milford Regional Counseling Services, Harbor Homes, Healthy at Home, and Keystone Hall.

As resource development director, part of her job was finding out what the staff needed and then finding money to pay for it.

For example, "the staff always wanted an indoor climbing wall," she said in an interview at the club last week.

Taylor acquired the grant money and donations and nine months later a 20-foot climbing wall was installed in an underused weight room.

Overall, she said she is working to make sure the club is "not just a place that kids hang out" and to "promote the good work we do and educate people so they feel committed to us."

The more people know about the club, the more they like it, she believes.

"I was always so impressed at the way the staff interacts with my own kids," she says. "But I think we can do a better job of getting the word out."

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Staff photo by Daymond Steer

Susan Taylor, the new director of the Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley, gets the "runaround" from some young club members.

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For next year she and her staff are planning a before- and after-school kindergarten program that will be housed in a portable classroom on the far side of the parking lot and provide care until 6 p.m.

Taylor's goals include getting closer to parents and working more collaboratively with people in the community.

She is also anticipating more requests for scholarship aid for summer camp, which means the club will solicit more scholarship money so it can fulfill its mission of never sending anyone away.

In the future she sees the club investing more in its theater program and having formal classes in technical theater arts "so we can capitalize on this great venue," the Amato Center for the Performing Arts, located at the club.