

Why Character?

By Suzanne McKenney, President, Character Council of Hamburg, Inc.

When our great country initially committed to formal education for its youngest citizens, it did so for two vital reasons. Firstly, formal education was meant to help people become smart... the academic piece. Secondly, but of equal or slightly greater importance, schools were established to help people learn to become *good* citizens... the character piece. Essentially, each piece is the full complement of the other.

As time has gone by, declining academic prosperity and societal degradation can be linked to the dire neglect of character development as an essential ingredient in the conventional education equation. Plagued with an American culture that is increasingly devoid of a positive character influence, emanate educational success on a local, and therefore, national scale has become less attainable. High expectations for academic achievement cannot be realized in the absence of high expectations for concurrent character development.

Character is the foundational element that anchors the components of successful living. Good character fortifies the opportunity for enduring achievement, academic and otherwise. It underpins sound decision-making. It girders emotional well-being. It gives structural integrity to healthy relationships. Conversely, and equally relevant, good character provides a powerful defense against a myriad of insidious ills too common in American society today.

If our society intends to nurture adults of good character, then we must diligently attend to character education for America's future, first by setting an honorable example ourselves, and then, by expecting the same of our young charges. The commitment to character enhancement must begin within the adult community before it can transcend generations to come. We are their role models. Our genuine pursuit of character quality must convince them to choose to emulate our worthy, yet humble, lead. Most critically, it is truly our adult obligation to foster a climate conducive to the development of exceptional character for our youth. Remember, children will not learn well what we neglect to carefully teach them.

The quest for character excellence should indeed be a societal concern remedied best by collaborative concerted action. To illustrate the concept of societal concern and action, consider the meaning of the word "culture". It refers to the way a society chooses to raise its young. Imagine then, what would be required for "Creating a Culture of Character"™... a society intent on the purposeful fostering of character within the context of nurturing its children. Envision the growth of character initiatives within and including all sectors of the community. Wouldn't that be the community where every parent would wish to lovingly raise his child?

Hamburg's Character Community Concept:

The Character Council of Hamburg, Inc.™, is a volunteer-driven, community-based initiative that is using a four-pronged approach to support the development and enhancement of character excellence for our citizens. These objectives are:

- ~ To create and coordinate **character awareness** initiatives throughout the community.
- ~ To encourage and strengthen **character education** and/or training initiatives in schools, businesses, government, churches, etc.
- ~ To inspire and reinforce **character promotion** on a community-wide scale.
- ~ To prosper **character recognition** programs and events throughout each sector of the community.

A not-for-profit organization, the Character Council is headed by a Board of Directors, working to thoughtfully coordinate Hamburg's character initiative through community committees that stretch into all sectors of our town. Each committee is purposing to meet the objectives for character excellence within their specific sphere of interest and influence. These community committees are:

- **Education** – consisting of a representative from every school in Hamburg.
- **Business/Civic** – comprised of representatives from local businesses and civic organizations.
- **Faith** – consisting of representatives from institutions of faith.
- **Government** – consisting of elected officials and government employees.
- **Media** – comprised of representatives from various media sources community-wide.

"I can do what you can't do, and you can do what I can't do. Together we can do great things." ~ Mother Teresa