

# A tale of ordinary heroes



JOHN STARKS/DAILY HERALD

Four Jack London Middle School boys, from left, Michael Vivacqua, Charles Toton, Brad Johnson and Derek Rivard, all of Arlington Heights, rescued a teen from a retention pond behind their Wheeling school in January.

## Seventh-graders take action to save teen who fell through ice

BY JIM BUTTS

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They don't consider themselves heroes. Heroes never do.

But Arlington Heights seventh-graders Brad Johnson, Derek Rivard, Charlie Toton and Michael Vivacqua say they saw someone in need and acted quickly on it, possibly saving a life.

"I wouldn't say heroes," Brad said, sitting next to his three friends. "We just saw a guy who needed help, and we helped him."

It is a cold Friday in the middle of January. The four friends are hanging out near Husky Park in Wheeling as they wait for another buddy to finish wrestling practice. The London Middle School students are so busy chatting they take little notice of a group of high school students walking across a

nearby retention pond.

Until they hear a crack.

Suddenly one of the high-schoolers plunges through the ice and the rest of the older kids scramble toward solid ground.

Initially stunned, the seventh-graders watch as the trapped boy makes several failed attempts to escape from the shoulder-deep water. Someone yells to call 911.

The four middle-schoolers spring into action, trying to reach the boy on the thin ice. The high schoolers yell to the boys the pond is too dangerous.

The kids quickly rethink their strategy and begin to break the ice from the edge of the pond in an attempt to carve a path for the boy to walk to safety. From the center of the pond, the trapped boy also breaks off chunks of ice as he struggles toward shore.

Using their smaller weight as

an advantage, the young boys stomp on the pond, careful to stay relatively shallow as the high schoolers yell directions from shore.

Soon the middle-schoolers are wading knee-deep in the water as they pull the teen to safety. As he stands in shock and embarrassment with cuts on his arms, the high school boy is handed a jacket and some dry towels by his friends before he is led to a friend's house.

The middle-schoolers don't know the teen's name but say they have seen him since the incident and he appears to have recovered fully.

After catching their breath, the younger boys come to a realization — they're freezing. They run back to the middle school where a teacher helps dry their clothes.

London Middle School Assistant Principal Peter Daleske

said he is proud of the students. "I think what surprised me the most was their assertiveness. They saw he needed help and decided to do something about it," he said.

Daleske even sent home a letter praising the boys to all families at the school.

"This story is a reminder to parents and educators alike, that our children who can't pickup their rooms, who at times appear distant, defiant, and self-involved, are also capable of great feats of selflessness," Daleske wrote in the letter.

The kids didn't know what to say about all that praise, but they do know if they could do it all over again they would, only a little faster this time.

"I would expect anybody who was in our shoes would have done the same thing," Brad said.