

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Making a difference

Cheektowaga students step up for blood drive

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Senior Corey Strasser donates blood for the first time. At left is Colleen Beagle of Upstate New York Transplant Services.

Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News



When Cheektowaga Central held a blood drive recently, the auditorium was full of students excited to donate.

Many high schools and colleges hold annual blood drives. According to Upstate New York Transplant services, 25 percent of all blood collected is donated by high school and college students. There are often blood shortages during the summer when school isn't in session.

Blood drives are a great way for teenagers to make a difference. At the Cheektowaga drive, rather than going to the Red Cross, student donations went to Upstate New York Transplant Services, which has set up its own blood collection network.

UNYTS assures that all donations are kept local; blood goes to Roswell Park, Erie County Medical Center and various other local health facilities. According to its Web site, keeping the donations local allows for the use of higher-quality blood products. The site says the blood is crucial to the survival of those living with leukemia and other cancers. Blood donations also benefit burn victims, organ recipients and accident victims.

Teenagers may be surprised to know that the few minutes it takes to make a blood donation can help save the lives of real people in this area. Students as young as 16 are able to donate, as long as they have parental consent. UNYTS representative Pam Giangreco-Marotta hopes that by educating young donors, teenagers will be more interested in donating on a regular basis. "That way we can prevent shortages in the future," she said.

Even though more than 30 high schools have drives scheduled through UNYTS during the 2007-08 year, Giangreco-Marotta encourages students to organize drives if their school does not currently have one.

Cheektowaga senior Melanie Reimondo has donated four times and her blood type makes her a universal donor. Her view is that donating blood "is a good thing, people should do it." Most students who gave blood at Cheektowaga did not personally know anyone in need of blood products, but simply liked the idea of being able to make a difference in someone's life. When asked what made him decide to donate for the first time, senior Jon Czaplicki answered, "I like helping people – and I did it for the cookies!"

For more information, find the Upstate New York Transplant Services Web site at www.unyts.org.

Rachel Stokes is a senior at Cheektowaga Central.