

# Everyday Heroes

## YMCA Kids Who Make A Difference In Their Communities

by Dr. Russell Quaglia

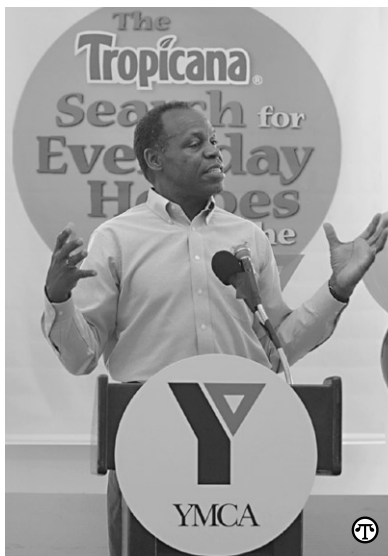
(NAPSA)—Perhaps more than any time in history, America—and particularly its children—needs real-life heroes. We must exemplify and celebrate the kind of citizens we hope they will become. Having “heroes” is necessary for students to experience and develop the ability and confidence to recognize right from wrong and status quo from what should be.

We can all take heart that untold numbers of otherwise ordinary men, women, boys and girls are making a difference and teaching a crucial lesson: It doesn't take a disaster to make a hero. In fact, the basic stuff of everyday heroes—the ability to look beyond oneself, to see how things could be better even if they aren't broken, to believe in something, and to take the initiative and run with it for the greater good—is being embraced and exhibited by America's adolescents.

Recognizing the immediate and long-range societal importance of saluting and encouraging acts of good will, Tropicana created “The Search for Everyday Heroes of the YMCA” uncovering thousands of youngsters doing amazing things for their communities. Children from diverse backgrounds and communities submitted service-learning proposals in a contest to gain help for achieving and sustaining their goals. The eight winners each received a \$3,000 grant from Tropicana to implement their proposal.

The YMCA youngsters have good role models. They feel they belong to a community, are curious about what might be and what they might achieve. They dare to ask “why not?” and are willing to take a risk. These qualities are representative of their aspirations in the making and at work.

Winning projects included: cleaning up Santa Cruz Beach and conducting regular trash



**Award-winning stage and screen actor and long-time social and community activist Danny Glover is spokesman for Tropicana's Everyday Heroes Program honoring YMCA kids across the country.**

pick-ups and water tests; creating a community flower garden in Oklahoma City; establishing mentoring and tutoring programs; establishing an Adopt a Grandparent program; setting up a program in which YMCA swim team members assist students in an adaptive swim class; and building a safe, new skate park in a low-income area of Massachusetts.

So, let's assure our children that the world is full of everyday heroes, who believe in themselves, inspire others and always give their best. Like Tropicana's Everyday Heroes' project, let's work as individuals to instill in our children not only the desire to dream but the realization that reaching those dreams takes planning and work.

• *Dr. Russell Quaglia is director of the National Center for Student Aspirations at the University of Maine.*