

## **Section I**

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- b. Name of Organization: Sweeny United  
Address of Organization: 1107 Avenue C, Sweeny, TX 77480

## **Section II**

- a. Purpose of Organization:

Sweeny United is a program to help the elderly, disadvantaged, and disabled residents of our community with home maintenance and repair projects.

Sweeny United is also a youth development program that impacts students in a positive manner by giving them an opportunity to learn new skills, accept team responsibilities, build new relationships, and experience the pleasure of helping others through volunteering.

How is this accomplished? Through a summer youth work week. For one week in June, teams of Junior and Senior high students go to pre-selected sites and complete work that has been requested by the homeowner. Each team has one or two adult volunteers to guide the students.

Work is done on a no charge basis for qualifying residents. Money is provided through fund-raisers and donations of individuals, clubs and organizations, local businesses, and churches. Sweeny United received a United Way Community Block Grant in 2002.

## **Section III**

- a. Description of innovative project:

In 2002, a group of citizens met to discuss plans for a youth program to benefit residents of our own community. Statistics for the 2000 Census Demographic Profiles gave us the following information:

Over 51% of our population were low to moderate income,  
20.3% individuals and families were below poverty level,  
26.8% (ages 20 to 64) had disability status,  
16% were over age 65, and  
80.85% of our houses were built before 1985.

There were other needs in our own community that could be met by volunteer youth and at the same time, we could provide our youth with an opportunity to develop life skills and to help others. That summer, 87 youth and a host of adults participated in a program that we call Sweeny United. In 2004, Sweeny United completed a third summer work week with 135 students and received 501(c)3 status. Plans are underway for our

next work week to begin June 5, 2005. We have grown each year and have solid broad-based community support.

Students build porches, wheelchair ramps, and put up porch and stair railings. They replace rotten boards, scrape and paint exteriors of homes, caulk and repair window facing and screens and replace windows and doors. Some teams clean flowerbeds, mow yards and trim shrubs. Un-kept vacant lots are tackled by others. Students, adult team guides, and residents build new relationships and become friends.

After the work day, students gather each evening of the week for a meal and special activities such as a movie night, swimming, team games, or pizza night to talk about the experiences of the week through a sharing session and video of the week's activities.

b. Description of significant problems solved by innovation:

Needs are being met for residents of our community through Sweeny United. For example, one elderly resident was living with her daughter in another town because she could not get in and out of her home. With a wheelchair ramp, she could move back home.

Another man, age 90, lives alone. He has very poor vision and was afraid to go out on his porch. Now, he enjoys his new porch and step railings and doesn't fear falling off the edge of the porch.

A grandmother is very happy to have a new lock on her front door. It seems like a very small thing, but she feels much safer now.

A Sweeny United volunteer helped a World War II vet sign up for prescription drugs and healthcare through the VA Hospital.

Adult volunteers re-wired a house that would not pass city inspection.

A younger diabetes patient, who is a double amputee, needed a ramp to get to her car to go for dialysis treatments.

Sometimes, Sweeny United projects change a whole neighborhood.

In 2003, students painted two houses in the same block. Before the year was over, two other houses in that block were repainted and the whole neighborhood was greatly improved.

The youth of our town also benefit from Sweeny United. Through these work projects, youth learn to work together in teams, to develop problem solving skills, and to use tools such as hammers, screw drivers, power saws and drills.

Last year, students expressed pride in the work they did. Sometimes there was joy in the accomplishment of hammering a nail in straight . One boy exclaimed, “THAT board is the one I replaced!” Hot, tired, sweaty teen-agers felt accomplishment and self-esteem soared!

Sweeny United gives students an opportunity to give unselfishly to benefit someone in need. Sweeny United is training students to volunteer today and throughout their life.

c. Description of demonstrated success and achieved outcomes for at least one year.

In 2004, 135 students worked at  
23 residential home sites and  
5 additional sites, such as vacant lot clean-ups, etc.  
28 sites in our community were improved through the efforts of  
15 work teams consisting of 7 to 10 students and 2 adults

If success can be measured by the gratitude of those residents who truly appreciated the improvements that were made to their homes, we have experience three very successful years.

Sweeny United impacts our community by bringing volunteers together. Our workforce crosses age, racial, and denominational boundaries. Volunteers come from any different organizations. Many are retired. Others take a week of vacation to work in the program. Some volunteer on days off. Students graduate and become college guides. Local businesses, the school district, EMS, the City of Sweeny, churches and service organizations all participate.

Will Burke, a 2004 High School graduate, sums up student success and achieved outcomes of Sweeny United in an answer to a question on his university application. With his permission, I quote his answer below:

“Although I have enjoyed helping in various roles, I have to say that I thoroughly enjoyed Sweeny United. I believe it helped many Sweeny youth learn to appreciate what you receive through giving. In that program the youth give very little – a little time and a little effort, but the rewards are so great. We all feel a sense of community, of realizing we are all in this world together. We feel a sense of accomplishment, of being able to sit back at the end of the week and see the improvement we have made in the quality someone else’s life. We enjoy the comradeship of being with other students. We are frequently grouped with other students we have not known very well – kids who are not in the same clique we are in school – but through Sweeny United we get to know one another a little better, and I think our school is better off because our sense of community carries over through the year. I also think it is a wonderful experience because it is a time when people of all ages come together to work for a common goal. It does the youth good to know that adults of all ages are still a vibrant, giving part of the community, and it gives the

adults an opportunity to see that the kids aren't just about driving around town too fast in cars with loud music."

Will is a three summer Sweeny United volunteer. He is now a freshman at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas.

To assess student outcomes, a survey is given at the end of each workweek. Of the surveys returned, all except 2 students said they would plan to participate in Sweeny United next year.

Question 10 on the survey was, "What did you personally gain from your Sweeny United experience?"

Some of the answers follow:

- ...respect for people who are less fortunate and will let the community children repair their homes
- ...that you don't need your best friends and most popular people to have fun and enjoy everybody through Christ
- ...how to trust people I did not know and how to be a better team member
- ...joy, satisfaction, good feeling that I helped someone who couldn't help themselves
- ...helping out is good even if you don't get paid
- ...love for the people we helped
- ...that we can make a difference
- ...friends and skills and pride
- ...better attitude
- ...feeling of accomplishment
- ...that we can make people happy by doing Sweeny United

d. Examples of how project is unique:

As far as we know, there are no other communities that have a program like Sweeny United. It is unique because students do home repair projects in their own community and have youth activities after the work day. We keep the students from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. each work day; they spend the night at home and return the next day. Several groups, such as The United Methodist Army or World Changers, have work weeks similar to Sweeny United. But each group we studied who had student work weeks to benefit the needy took their students to other communities to do the work.

Sweeny United is unique in that students have a work week in their own hometown. There are several benefits to doing the work in our own community.

1. Students realize there are real needs at home
2. Many students see a part of town they have never been to before
3. Students meet and build relationships with local adult mentors
4. Students are placed on teams of mixed grade levels. Older and younger youth become friends
5. Seniors and college students become student team leaders
6. Adults appreciate what good kids we have in our town

7. New friendships are formed across age, racial, socio-economic barriers
8. Our community comes together in a common cause
9. Our elderly, disadvantaged, and disabled residents are given needed help
10. Our youth discover the benefits of giving back to their community

The unique quality of Sweeny United is that people of the community are reaching out to benefit others in our own community in a way that gives our youth a chance to make life better for someone else without asking for anything in return.

#### **Section IV**

a. Evidence that the project may be duplicated in other rural areas of the state  
Sharing the “at home” project with others is a goal of the Sweeny United Board of Directors. We have developed safety manuals, a schedule that works, and forms for applications and job assignments.

We know it can work and will benefit a rural town. We will be happy to share any materials with other communities. We will send a consultant to any rural community in Texas that would like to begin a program like Sweeny United.

Our program began with a vision and about 10 people who believed it could be done. Sweeny United is off and running and willing to help others who wish to accomplish the same.

Attachments:

- a. Current fiscal year budget
- b. Copy 501(c)3
- c. Letter from Sweeny Mayor, Larry Piper