

SPOTLight on Joseph Mandina Dierberg's Floral Central Design *Helping Needy Teens*

Life wasn't always rosebuds and peace lilies for Joseph Mandina, an 11-year member of Local 655 employed at Dierberg's Floral Central Design.

Mandina grew up in the inner city where life was rough, he says. It wasn't until someone took an interest in him that he learned you could turn your life around.

Now, he's paying it forward, mentoring inner city teens in hopes they will make the right choices.

It's been several years since Mandina began sharing his life with underprivileged youth. Some days he may just shoot hoops with them; other days he'll be sharing life experiences. He says growing up in the city helped him learn the "rules of the road," and his knowledge is now helping youth to find a different path.

Mandina is currently working to broaden his volunteer work with a "scared straight" type program, Dwayne's Prayer, taking young boys and girls on prison visits to show them there's nothing cool about being incarcerated. Local 655 Officers have helped him get in contact with a state senator who may help open doors to a closer look at prison life and what happens when you make the wrong decisions.

"These days it tends to be a right of passage for inner city kids to go to prison; they expect it and it adds to their 'tough guy' reputation," Mandina said. "The kids that I see in the inner city tend to be looking up to those in prison. One out of seven has someone in prison."

Mandina believes you become a product of your environment—that you can either adapt or change. He says the young inner city youth become so used to friends and



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relatives going to prison, they think it's their natural path.

"It's a different way of life in the inner city, and what they come to expect out of life isn't the way it has to be," Mandina said. "With just a little help or support, their lives can be changed. I get to plant that seed that may impact their lives."

Mandina estimates that he's had a profound affect on about 25 kids. If there are others affected, it's their family and friends who are reaping the harvest.

"I was raised in the inner city, and all these problems they're facing, I've faced at some point in my life," Mandina said. "I've seen a lot of kids without good role models, and I just thought I'd step up to the plate."

Mandina is modest when complimented for his work.

"I'm a Christian, and although I don't do it purposely, the best example is leading by example," Mandina said. "If someone takes a lesson from me, to them be the glory."