

Moose call for new image during Hamburg visit

By Brett Hambright

Reading Eagle

Moose International is not a sportsmen's group. Its antlered emblem has nothing to do with hunting.

And that Moose Lodge on the corner in many Pennsylvania towns is much more than a social hangout.

"We're the best kept secret in the world," said Bruce Berger of Quakertown, who is one of the organization's highest-ranking officials and also a member of several lodges, including the one in Hamburg.

The secret was let out Sunday.

George W. McCullough III, who as supreme governor of the group's top official, headlined an event at the lodge on South Third Street, near State Street, in Hamburg to promote awareness of the Moose organization's numerous fundraising efforts.

Membership in the fraternal organization has grown to about 1 million, and there are nearly 2,000 Moose lodges worldwide, mostly in the United States. Hamburg's is the only one in Berks County.

You might have heard of them. Or maybe you haven't.

"We're not the neighborhood bar," said Berger, the International Moose Legion president. "There are a lot of misconceptions."

Each Moose lodge has a bar and pool table, but at the heart of the organization are projects that have raised millions of dollars and rescued needy children from dire straits.

On Sunday, 15 children from Mooseheart Child City & School, a Moose-sponsored program in the Chicago area that provides shelter, education, discipline and religion for those in need, were in Hamburg.

Oumarou Abdulaho, a 16-year-old Mooseheart resident, said he'll forever be in debt to the organization.

"I'd probably not be in school," he said. "I'd have dropped out, and would be hanging with the wrong crowd."



Reading Eagle: Tim Leedy

George W. McCullough III, supreme governor of Moose International, is introduced to Deena Kershner, program manager of Hamburg's Our Town Foundation, as he meets and greets during his visit Sunday to the Moose Lodge in Hamburg. Lodge administrator Charlie Henn, center, made the introduction.

Instead, he recently placed third in the high jump at the Illinois state track and field championships and is excelling in the classroom.

A native of Sierra Leone, Africa, who lost his mother soon after birth and was living on the street at age 8, Abdulaho plans to attend college as a criminal justice major.

If he graduates from Mooseheart High School with a grade point average of at least 3.0, the organization will give him a \$36,000 scholarship.

"I owe them a lot," he said.

Founded in 1888, Moose International offers members social clubs and the chance to participate in events that raise money for projects such as Mooseheart.

McCullough and several local officials celebrated the cause in Hamburg.

"This is something every community needs," McCullough told a crowd of more than 100. "This will continue to grow because we meet the needs of men, women and children."

The key is exposure to the group and understanding what it does, members agreed.

"The misconceptions started years ago," Berger said.

He pointed to a common, but mistaken view: "Dad would go down to the Moose, play poker and come home drunk.

"We're trying to get rid of that (misconception), but we just can't seem to get by it."

Hamburg Fire Company Chief Troy R. Hatt said he was unaware of the group's purpose even after he joined several years back.

"I didn't truly understand the whole program until the past few months," he said. "With all the hustle and bustle of life, not everybody understands or knows about the Moose."

Perhaps they should, the group's leaders said Sunday.

That will only create more success stories - like Abdulaho's.

"When I grow up, I'm going to be a member," Abdulaho said. "To try and pay them back."

Contact Brett Hambright: 610-371-5022 or bhambright@readingeagle.com.