

Elgin

Students say 'yes' to hip-hop, 'no' to drugs, alcohol

By Meena Razvi
SPECIAL TO THE COURIER NEWS

Seventh- and eighth-graders at Larsen Middle School stood in a circle around Montenez Buckley, eager to begin their weekly hip-hop dance lesson.

"Everybody, do what I do," instructs Buckley as he demonstrates a dance step called Apache Lines.

Deftly moving his feet in time to the song *B-Boy Stance* by K-O-S, Buckley encouraged the children to practice. Together, they clap, dance and laugh, following the instructor as he calls out the steps. Some dance easily. Others are shy and hesitant. Together, they learn to move each part of their bodies, trying hard to keep in time to the beat.

After they became familiar with each step, Buckley taught them how to put all the moves together into a longer sequence by calling out, "shoulder, elbow, wrist; now wave it out," as they twisted, turned and bent in unison like a dance troupe.

Buckley, co-artistic director of Stick And Move Dance Group in Chicago as well as a member of Hip Hop Congress, travels week-

ly to Larsen Middle School to teach life skills through dance and group discussions.

The eight-week program, headed by Elgin's Renz Center's

Prevention Department, engages students in hip-hop dance instruction while educating them in drug- and alcohol-prevention strategies. The session ends May 30.

"This is the first time, kind of a pilot," explained Melina Pantoja, prevention specialist at the Renz Addiction Counseling Center. "Teen Talk is about life skills and decision-making but trendier in hip-hop and dancing."

Wearing black pants, an HHU (Hip Hop University) T-shirt and dreadlocks pulled back into a ponytail, Buckley curbed and bent his body easily into each dance sequence.

"You have to separate industry rap, which taints the art from true hip-hop," declared Buckley,

who is aware of the bad rap hip-hop has received since the 1990s when lyrics began to emphasize violence, drugs and sex.

As part of the program at Lar-

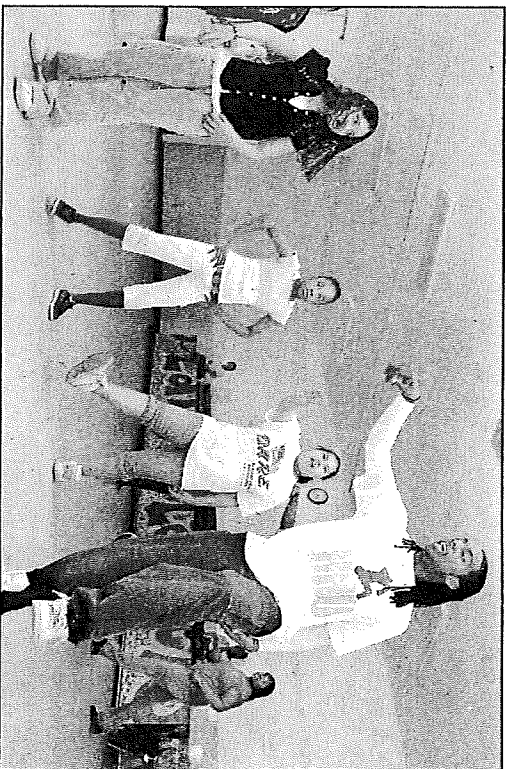
Teen Talk is about life skills and decision-making

Melina Pantoja, prevention specialist

sen, coordinators invite students to write and discuss what they want and don't want: "I don't want addiction," and "I want an education."

They also ask the students, "What profession do you want in the future?" and "What are some things you want to avoid to get there?" to prompt students' creativity and decision-making.

Funded by the Elgin Noon Kiwanis Club and the Ancient Free and Accepted Mason, Lodge No. 117, the prevention program is a collaboration of several agencies: Renz Addiction Counseling Center, Boys & Girls Club of America and Hip Hop Congress. Renz soon will launch a similar program at Kimball Middle School in Elgin. Looking lean, fit and happy,



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Dance instructor Montenez Buckley (right, front) of Chicago teaches area kids hip-hop dancing at a pilot program at Larsen Middle School in Elgin as part of a drug and alcohol abuse prevention strategy facilitated by the Renz Center Prevention Department.

Buckley is a perfect role model for children vulnerable to being sucked into a life of violence, gangs or substance abuse. Accordingly, they look up to Buckley, who avoided gangs and substance abuse as a child in his South Side Chicago neighborhood by attending a similar after-school program. "I would have been affected without programs like this," said Buckley.

On the Net

- Hip Hop Congress: <http://hiphop.chicago.edu>
- Renz Addiction Counseling Center: www.renzcenter.com