





# Wheel of Fortune

**JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS GET A REALITY CHECK IN THE GAME OF LIFE.**

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**C**lickety, clickety, click. The wheel of life is fraught with peril. Click: You're caught driving under the influence of alcohol and sent to court, where you're given a stiff fine and a lecture about public safety. Click: You're ill and referred to the hospital, where you undergo a costly appendectomy. Click: House fire. Click: Divorce. Click: Taxes.

It's enough to send an eighth-grader in search of a second job.

For the past 11 years, the Kiwanis Club of Greencastle, Indiana, has been giving young teens a peek at their futures by hosting its annual Reality Experience. Five area schools bus their eighth-graders to the expansive York Auto Family Community Building at the Putnam County Fairgrounds, where

each student passes through a gauntlet of 14 wage-depleting stations.

Darian is married. By the luck of a draw, he picked an "M" card rather than an "S." Now he cradles an oversize die, closes his eyes with a wish and casts for the number of children he'll support. The cube rocks between zero and one before resting on ... four. He's stunned: "I have four kids!"

A friend pats him on the shoulder and assures him, "You're a dentist. You make \$111,000 a year. You'll be all right."

Most of the students do all right through the initial stages, establishing savings accounts at the bank, purchasing or renting a residence and paying for utilities. Then, they meet June Brattain. She sells cars.



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“We try to help them make sensible decisions, but some of them just can’t resist,” Brattain says as she shakes her head. “They may have four or five children, but they just have to have a sports car.

“We tell them that if they get into financial trouble later, we’ll be happy to help them with a trade-in.”

Brattain will be ready. She has a roomy family mini-van with a five-year plan at just \$250 a month.

Booth after booth, the students see their wages dwindle. Insurance. Clothing. Food. Furniture. Health care. Vacations and entertainment. And the unpredictable, ruthless, spinning, clicking Wheel of Life.

“It’s really the wheel of misfortune,” says Marlene Masten, who operates the booth with Georgenna Gick. They both are members of Kappa Delta Phi philanthropic sorority. Though the wheel offers positive outcomes (tax refunds, lottery winnings), it also has costly consequences (court costs, house fires). “It’s the ruin of a lot of the kids,” Masten adds.

Across the room, Kathleen Glaser stands near the League of Women Voters’ election booth. A Cloverdale Middle School counselor, Glaser watches her students as they finish the

serpentine course. Their smiles and frowns are clear evidence of their fates.

Each school has its own methods by which its students can select careers from a list of 131 occupations. Cloverdale matches each student’s academic performance to career opportunities.

With excellent grades, you can select a lucrative career with a six-figure annual salary. Lower grades limit choices, including a cashier job at \$16,600 annually.

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Lindsey, a Cloverdale student, has run out of money. To make ends meet, she picks up a second job as a guard. “Ms. Glaser!” she calls out.

“I don’t know how my mother does it,” the student says gleefully. “I’m going home to give her a hug.”

Mary Timm knows that feeling. A couple years ago, she went through the Reality Experience. As a psychologist, married and with one child, she did quite well, finishing with a \$4,500 surplus. Did it have an impact on how she looks at life? “Oh, definitely,” she nods.

“It was really eye-opening for me and my friends,” she says. “I saw a lot of people who changed a lot after that.



They got better grades. They were a lot more focused.”

Now a sophomore and Key Club member at North Putnam High School, Timm sells items such as sofas and refrigerators at the furniture and appliance booth. She’s one of many community volunteers who help Kiwanis stage the experience every year. At the vacation and entertainment booth, Rotarians sell trips to Caribbean islands or tickets to Indianapolis Colts football games. In the kitchen, the Lions Club serves pizza, breadsticks, salads and drinks. Area bankers advise students on savings accounts and investments. Realtors sell and rent homes and apartments.

Other volunteers just enjoy volunteering.

“We’re a close-knit group,” says Brattain of her fellow car sales staff. They’re not Kiwanians, nor Rotarians or Lions or bankers. She points to the tall fellow at the end of the table. “He’s the town handyman,” she says. “He can fix anything, and he just loves to help kids.” Then she wraps an arm around the woman beside her and says, “She’s my best friend. Everyone in town knows her, and she’s always volunteering.”

James Maxwell was instrumental in organizing the annual event when his Kiwanis club took it over from the local professional women’s group in 2006. This year, he turned over the leadership reins to Justin Long. But Maxwell remains involved, tapping his pencil to point out different styles of furniture. “This one is a little cheaper, but it may not last you very long,” he tells his customer. The student decides to spend the extra money for more durable furnishings. Maxwell and the student calculate the purchase and subtract the total from the student’s check register.

“You’re running low,” Maxwell warns. “Your next stop is medical. Then, the Wheel of Life. Good luck.”

Clickety, clickety, click. ☐



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## A community effort

The Putnam County community helps the Greencastle Kiwanis Club put on its annual Reality Experience. Here's a short list of who's who:

- Kiwanis organizes the event.
- Schools prepare students, transport them and counsel them afterward.
- Manpower, a human resource consulting firm, sets career salaries.
- Business, government and medical representatives consult on prices and provide volunteers.
- Service groups and citizens volunteer.

# THE GAME OF LIFE

Follow Grace and Trey as they chase their dreams in the Kiwanis Reality Experience.

Grace Burdge and Trey Blaydes have pretty good ideas about what they want to do as adults. The two South Putnam County Middle School eighth-graders pick their jobs and venture into a maze of utility bills, food purchases and the frequently unmerciful Wheel of Life.

## Grace

Career: Veterinarian  
 Monthly pay: US\$6,325  
 Family: Married, 2 children

Mortgage = \$420 month

New minivan = \$350 month

Yes

It's costly supporting a family of five: \$1,200 for food and \$225 for clothing.

None needed.

With the draw of a card, Grace pays only \$40 for vitamins.

What luck! Grace receives \$50 for being a "good neighbor"!

Grace finishes the game with \$2,126.

Who will survive the Greencastle, Indiana, Kiwanis Club's Reality Experience?

Housing

Transportation

Insurance

Food, Clothing, Furniture

Career Counseling

Medical/Dental/Optical

Wheel of Life

Game Over

## Trey

Career: Coach  
 Monthly pay: US\$2,083  
 Family: Single, 0 children

Mortgage = \$375 month

Used car = \$200 month

Low on funds. None.

Despite shopping at discount stores, Trey runs out of money.

Trey takes a second job as a security guard, adding \$1,875 to his income.

With no insurance, Trey gets hit for the full cost of a tonsillectomy.

What luck! Trey is sent to the doctor for a \$50 physical.

Trey has \$813 at the game's end.

With a high-paying job and a little luck, Grace clearly succeeded. Trey survived by supplementing his dream career's salary with a second job. In this game, money is one measure of success. Happiness is another. Learn more about this Kiwanis game of life at "Wheel of Fortune," starting on page 22.