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## **My school lives on in Round Lake kids**

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Imagine my surprise in discovering that my defunct alma mater is alive and well and working to better the lives of school kids in Round Lake.

Barat College in Lake Forest closed in 2005. But the Barat Education Foundation carries on the college's mission to promote social awareness "so as to impel to action."

Through its after-school program, Our American Voice, the nonprofit foundation teaches middle school students what every citizen of our great nation should learn early and hear often: Together, aided by the democratic process, we can make life better.

Students from Magee and Round Lake middle schools and 13 other Chicagoland middle schools on Friday presented the results of their projects at an Our American Voice summit in Chicago.

At Magee, students learned how to work together to develop a solution to a predicament that has left too many of their classmates on the sidelines: the inaccessibility of school sports physicals.

"It seemed like such a big problem," said Magee eighth-grader Faith Gazdzicki. "But it's really cool how through other people's help we can get things done."

Sheila Smith, director of the foundation, argues that the failure to teach the process of civic engagement leads to an alienation that undermines both democratic values and academic achievement. She points to research that shows that "engaging students on their values and aspirations can have dramatic impacts on overall grades and test scores."

"Middle school is a time when kids are making decisions on how they're going to live their lives," Smith said. "We can't wait until high school to impress upon students that citizenship is a responsibility, that democracy is an evolutionary process led by citizens."

Smith was prescient when, in 2004, she predicted that even if Barat's buildings were knocked to rubble, the spirit of the institution would not die.

"To improve our world, you need to care, have knowledge and take action," she said.

My old school lives -- in Round Lake and beyond.