



LifeSmarts
Learn it. Live it.

Faces of LifeSmarts | Lois Johnson

A LifeSmarts veteran coach



Lois Johnson (left) with LifeSmarts program director Lisa Hertzberg

Teaching students practical life lessons for 16 years

LifeSmarts competition, a roller coaster ride of emotion

Lois Johnson has six kids, seven grandkids, and 100's of LifeSmarts kids. She has been coaching for 16 years, continually expanding her LifeSmarts family. Johnson has now entered her last year coaching the program. Retirement lies ahead, but first she aims to lead Willow River High School to a seventh consecutive Minnesota state championship and a trip to Orlando for the 2014 national championship.

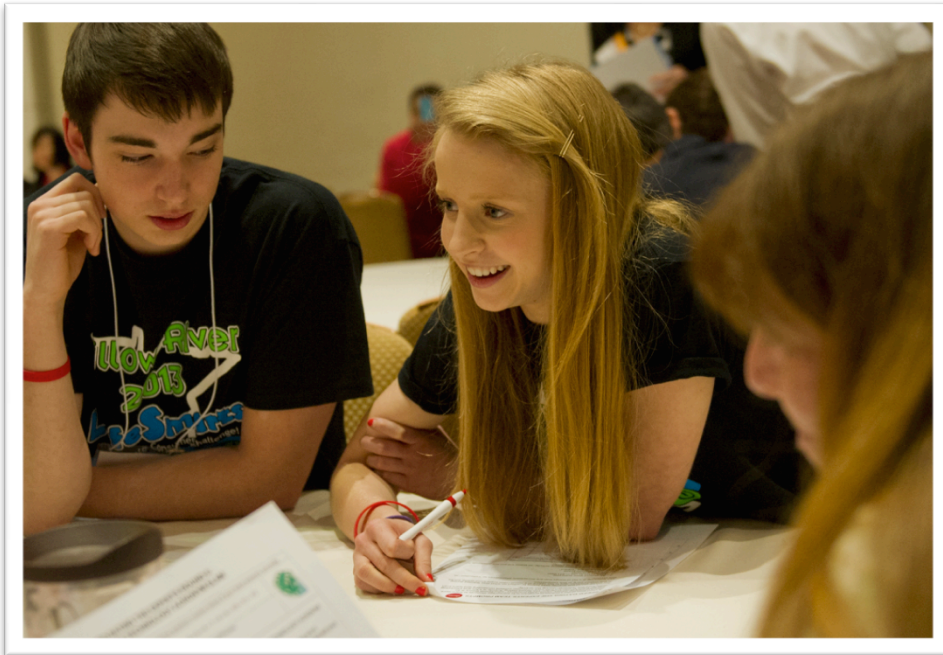
Throughout her years participating in LifeSmarts, Johnson has had her fair share of laughs, tears, and heart palpitations.

“I get really nervous during competitions,” says Johnson. “I just put my head down on the table; I can’t even look.”

A few years ago, Dougie, a special education student from Willow River, a K-12 school with fewer than 500 students, enrolled in

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For Lois Johnson, LifeSmarts is a family affair. Many of her children have participated in the program including Hayley (pictured left).

Johnson's LifeSmarts class. Initially, Johnson was skeptical that he could beat out many of his fellow students and earn a spot on the 5-person team, which was headed to the state competition, but through hard work and hours of studying, he did. During the competition, Johnson assumed her position—head down on the table, eyes closed—as she tried to suppress her nerves.

“Suddenly everyone gasped,” said Johnson. “I looked up, it was a crucial point in the match, and Dougie had just buzzed in. He got the question right and then proceeded to get two or three more questions right. It was something from a movie, he was so excited. This little special education student was so

shy, and here he was answering questions, and you could see his confidence growing. The whole experience was...” after a long pause, “life changing.”

LifeSmarts is a program designed to prepare all students, not just straight-A students, for the basics skills they need to navigate life's pitfalls and obstacles.

“The information is so practical,” Johnson explains. “You can take algebra or geometry and learn some stuff, but I tell my students I'm going to teach you things you'll actually be using. It's survival.”

The lessons learned through the LifeSmarts curriculum will be valuable throughout life; avoiding identity theft, learning how to deal with insurance policies, and renting your first apartment. But the relationships

formed in LifeSmarts can also last a lifetime.

“I'm proud to be a part of the first-ever LifeSmarts wedding,” says Johnson. “One of my former LifeSmarts kids is marrying a boy from Alabama, someone she met at the LifeSmarts national competition. I was invited to the wedding, and they told me they were going to have LifeSmarts questions on every table.”

At this LifeSmarts event Johnson will have no need to assume her all-to-familiar competition position. Head held high, she will proudly welcome this new addition to her LifeSmarts family.