



Sophia Leksan displays a Darfur photo Photo by Lee Borrowman

JM Student Learns a Different Sort of Lesson

By Lee Borrowman

“I have a story for you,” read the subject line of an email from JM Principal Catherine Mikes.

Although nobody knew it at the time, the prelude to the story Mikes wanted to tell was in these pages on April 4. It was an article about Respect All Differences (RAD) Week at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate, and a special presentation at the end of the week by members of the Campolindo chapter of Students Take Action Now on Darfur (Campo STAND) which was, for many JM students, their first introduction to Darfur and to the word ‘genocide.’ In the audience that day sat 6th grader Sophia Leksan. Not long after the RAD events Sophia came to Mikes, bound and determined to help the children of Darfur.

“When she first came to me,” said Mikes, “she was so genuine and passionate about her cause.” Sophia later explained that, “Most of the (displaced) victims in Darfur are children under the age of five.” She lowered her head and stared glumly at the table in front of her as she noted, “All those people are being killed just because of the color of their skin.”

Sophia asked Mikes if she could set up a table at JM’s Spring Fling/Open House on April 26, to inform people about the conditions in Darfur and raise funds to help the children. Mikes was impressed, and agreed to the plan. “She worked hard to pull it together. Her determination and heart have really impressed me for an eleven year old girl.”

Sophia did a lot of internet research to prepare for the event, and partnered with Campo STAND which provided her with images from its slideshow and other supplies. JM teacher and RAD coordinator Patti Forster said, “In all my years working on RAD, I don’t remember any JM student ever being inspired to take up a cause, and to go out and raise money for it, on their own, without a teacher as the guiding force.” With the help of friends, Sophia raised \$175.52 at the event.

Sophia is now looking forward to a summer beach vacation with her family, but she will

not soon forget her experience this spring. “It doesn’t matter how old you are or where you live. You can still help people who are in other places,” says Sophia. She hopes that students at other schools will take up the cause: “You might be small, but you can make a big difference.”

Catherine Mikes praised Anna Schoenbrunner and Katie Holmes of STAND for being wonderful role models with the ability to inspire younger students to take action. Schoenbrunner, who established Campo STAND this past year, writes: “STAND is honored to learn that we have inspired someone to take a stance and get involved- especially at such a young and vulnerable age. Most people think that middle schoolers (don’t) pay much attention to current events, but we have learned through our work that this is simply not true. With a little inspiration and encouragement (students like Sophia) will be the leaders of tomorrow.” Campo STAND just donated \$2000, from its fundraising and tee-shirt sales, to Relief International. You can reach Campo STAND by email: campostand@hotmail.com. For more information on the national STAND organization, go to www.standnow.org. For Darfur donation information, www.savedarfur.org and www.ri.org.



Anna Schoenbrunner and Katie Holmes at JM’s RAD event



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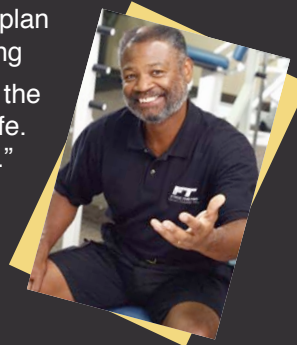
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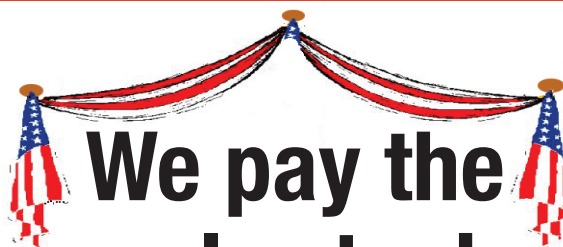
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