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## How Six Figure Income Families Get Thousands of Dollars in Free Money For College

Local man teaches free workshops to help parents save thousands in process

**Moraga**—East Bay parents that are planning on sending a child to college in the next few years, but aren't quite sure how to pay for it can now rest a little easier. Gerna Benz of Bay Area College Planners has been educating families in the community for over 15 years.

"It's really sad, but most parents that we talk to have done real well financially, but never found the time to save for college, and now they're facing a bill of \$18,000-\$45,000 a year, and they don't know who to turn to," he says. "Further, most of the time, all they hear is to not even bother applying for any aid because they make too much money. However, most of the time, that is simply not true even if they make a six-figure income."

Gerna would know, because his group has worked with over 1400 families in the last 10 years ranging from single moms to corporate CEO's, and they say they can help anyone get through the process and save a bundle...no matter how good of a student they have or how much money they make.

"I got started in this because I was a very good student, but no one told us anything about how to access money for college, or even how to pick a career...so I didn't go right away. But, I vowed that I would learn the process and devote my time to helping families not fall into the same trap that we did. 'Simply put, we show parents the truth that they aren't hearing anywhere else about how the college process really works and save thousands of dollars in the process.'"

Lamorinda parents will have a couple opportunities to hear Gerna speak. He is

teaching his class 'How to Give Your Kid a 4-Year College Education Without Going Broke!' on Wednesday March 18th at the Orinda community Center located at 26 Orinda Way, Orinda, CA 94563 from 7:00 PM -8:30 PM, and Thursday March 26th at Round Table Pizza located at 361 Rheem BLVD, Moraga, CA 94556 from 7:15 PM - 8:45 PM.

"We'll discuss everything from the greatest myths about the college process, to how to send your student to a fancy private school for less than the cost of a junior college...it'll be like learning how to get a brand new Lexus for the price of a used pick up truck," he grins.

Topics will also include why private scholarships and 529 plans are a waste of time, how to double or even triple the amount of free money you receive from each school, and how to avoid the one mistake that will kill your chances of getting any money at all that almost every other parent will make this coming January, and much, much more.

"They will learn a ton, and I do my best to make the class fun," he says. "It's like I'm giving them a super bright flash light to navigate a pitch black cave, while all the other parents continue to stumble around blindly! 'Don't forget: the class is totally free, but seats are limited. Also, we are not sure when we will be teaching these classes in the East Bay again since my April and May calendar is already filling up, so come on out and see me.' You can reserve a seat online at PayForCollegeNow.com/LAM or by calling our 24 hour reservation line at (800) 676-0496 ext. 503

## Miramonte's "Grease" is Electrifyin'!

Submitted by Terri Anderson



Photo courtesy of Terri Anderson

Fifty Miramonte High School performers, tech crew and band members transport you to Rydell High School where the T-Birds and Pink Ladies bring the toe tapping music, and energetic dance numbers of "Grease" to the Miramonte Theater. Watch Danny (Maxwell Tzannes) and Sandy (Sarah Ames) work through their high school romance, while the cast performs this revival version. Fea-

tured songs include "Grease is the Word," "Summer Nights," "Greased Lightning," "Hopelessly Devoted to You," "Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee," "Beauty School Dropout," and "You're the One that I Want." Other cast members include Katie Behnke as Rizzo, Kelsey Bergman as Marty, Daniel Coleman as Roger, Max Coleman as Doody, Suvi Gluskin as Frenchy, David Horstman as Teen Angel,

Ted Kizor as Johnny Casino, and Tommy Miers as Kenickie. Remaining show dates include: Thursday, Friday and Saturday March 19 - 21 at 7:30pm. Discount tickets are available online (\$10 for students; \$15 for adults), but must be purchased no later than 4 p.m. on the day of the show at www.acalanes.k12.ca.us/miramonte. Tickets at the door are \$15 per student; \$20 per adult.

## Del Oro Named Model Continuation High School

By Andrea A. Firth



Del Oro students (L to R) Katherine Hernandez, John Barron, Chelsey Dorsett, and Che Da Silva

Photo A. Firth

"One size just doesn't fit all," explains Rae Eckholm, the principal of Del Oro High School. Del Oro was one of 14 schools in California to be recognized as a Model Continuation High School in 2009 for their program designed to help struggling students stay in school on a path to graduation and opportunities in college and the work world.

"Our goal is for each student to be successful in whatever path they choose," she says.

Students come to Del Oro because of a lack of success in one of the traditional high schools. A firm believer in second chances, Eckholm, who has served as the principal at Del Oro for the past six years, has fostered a safe, caring environment that takes every opportunity to acknowledge the student achievements.

Part of the Acalanes Union High School District, Del Oro is set upon a hill off Tice Valley Boulevard and shares a campus with the Adult Education Center. Students navigate their way from one of the school's four main classrooms to a central hallway, and spill out into a sunny courtyard with picnic tables and landscaped planter boxes to have lunch. The setting feels relaxed and comfortable.

"It's really friendly here," states John Barron, a senior, who identifies the one-on-one academic help available at Del Oro as a very positive aspect of the school. "The help is here if you need it."

Del Oro has a cross section of students, most of which switch to the continuation high school because they have fallen behind in academic credits and are at risk of not graduating. (Del Oro requires 205

credits to graduate versus the 240 required at AUHSD's traditional high schools.) Approximately 40 percent of Del Oro's 70 students transfer from Miramonte, Campolindo, and Acalanes High Schools.

Although behavior problems may be the reason some students land at Del Oro, Eckholm says students with more serious offenses are often required to meet a set of predetermined expectations, or live by a contract, in order to attend. However, Eckholm adds that the students' credit deficiencies are due to variety of factors such as family issues, social challenges, and stress that lead to increased absences and falling behind.

The school's small size allows students to get a lot of attention and early intervention. "Kids don't get lost here," states Eckholm. And she keeps careful track of her students. "We pay close attention to attendance."

Eckholm will personally call a student's cell phone if needed. "With a school this size, we know when a student is gone, and we are sure to acknowledge their return."

In addition to recognition from State educators, Del Oro's pragmatic approach and individualized attention yields positive feedback from the students as well. "I like it a lot better here. The smaller school allows teachers to give you more time," explains junior Chelsey Dorsett. "And you know everyone," she adds with a confident smile.

## Education, Equity, Parity and Partner Organizations

By Jean Follmer (Andrea Firth contributed to this story)

Whether it's an annual fund drive or a black tie auction, parents from certain Lamorinda school districts traditionally have more fundraising success than others.

Although they may have the ability to fill more site needs or wants than another school in the same district, the concepts of equity and parity (no favoritism and overall equality) are being applied in many districts to provide equivalent opportunities to all students within the district.

Sticking with this guideline, however, is not always easy. In some cases, the equitable concepts can become more of a challenge for a school district to maintain.

"We had a school that was capable and willing to hire a certificated employee," said Moraga School Superintendent Rick Schafer. However, funds were not available to hire the same type of certificated employee for the other Moraga elementary schools. As a result, Moraga developed the Supplemental Instructional Resources Fund (SIRF) - a fund that all of the Moraga PTAs contribute to that is dispersed to the schools equally.

Since all of the Moraga elementary schools funnel to Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School (JM), the district decided that all students entering JM should arrive from an equitable playing field. Schafer said the District decided, "We would live and die together."

To date, Moraga has only re-

quired parity in the area of personnel. "Our next area of concern that's been brought up is 'things,'" said Schafer. While the district currently allows its school communities to purchase things like whiteboards, computers and other materials, he said the district is likely to step in to level that playing field as well.

Like Moraga, all Lafayette elementary schools funnel to one middle school: Stanley. The Lafayette School District's equity policy applies to both personnel and to "big ticket" items.

For instance, Springhill recently gained approval from the district to complete its garden. Although the garden was paid for by the Parent Faculty Club and grant money, the district approval process was lengthy. While the Board did not dispute the perceived value of having a garden on site or the fact that other Lafayette elementary schools have gardens, there were many questions raised regarding equity and potential costs to the District.

When the Lafayette School District receives a request from a school site, Superintendent Fred Brill said the district essentially considers five questions: Is it a strategic priority for the District? Is it equitable? How many potential stakeholders are there (is 90% of the school requesting this or is it three parents)? Is it a one-time payout or are there ongoing costs for the District? And, has it been ap-

proved by the Board and all Principals?

"It gets really challenging when we have an expense reduction plan," noted Brill. In these times, it's even more about priorities and making sure the students have the basics first. Brill said the District seeks to "serve meat and potatoes before dessert."

"We don't take all parent dollars and redistribute them. We're careful to give some autonomy to the sites," Brill explained. In short, the District recognizes that each school has its own culture and seeks to support that.

Contributions from partner organizations are vital in Orinda as well. About six years ago, the Orinda Unified School District (OUSD) addressed the equity issue to determine if all students were getting their fair share.

"We wanted to ensure an equitable school experience for all students as they moved on to OIS [Orinda Intermediate School]," states OUSD Governing Board President Riki Sorenson. Parents across the District worked together to establish priority needs and then agreed to fund these "equity items" with fundraising monies from Parents Clubs and other sources first.

"We try to maintain equity across the schools for anything that will affect the instructional program," states Orinda Union School District Superintendent (OUSD) Dr. Joe Jaconette, "and it is fairly well-balanced."

## Rotary Club of Lafayette Scholarship Applications Due

Submitted by Geoff Zimmerman

For those interested in studying abroad, applications for the 2010-11 Rotary Foundation Ambassadorial Scholarships are due March 31, with both Academic-Year and Multi-Year Ambassadorial Scholarships available.

The scholarship for one academic year abroad is a flat grant of \$23,000, or its equivalent. The Multi-year Ambassadorial Scholarships are flat grants of \$11,500 per year for two years toward the cost of a degree program in another country. Also available are Cultural Ambassadorial Scholarships that provide funding for three or six months of intensive language study and cultural immersion in another country and



are flat grants of \$10,000 and \$15,000, respectively.

Scholars represent their homelands and work to further international understanding through appearances before Rotary clubs and districts, schools, civic organizations, and other forums in their host countries.

Applicant interviews will be conducted between March 31 and April 14, and club nominations will be sent to the district where addition interviews will be conducted. The final, formal scholarship offers will be made by Rotary International in November.

To receive an application or request further information, please contact Geoffrey Zimmerman of the Rotary Club of Lafayette at either geoffreyzimmerman@hotmail.com or (925) 698-3683. Information is also available at the Rotary International website <http://www.rotary.org/en/StudentsAndYouth/EducationalPrograms/AmbassadorialScholarships/>

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