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Red Ribbon Week: Three High Schools, Three Ways to Promote a Drug and Alcohol Free Environment

By *Sophie Braccini*

With a fatal incident that cost the life of a Lamorinda student last year, local high schools are focusing on all the possible sides of alcohol and drug prevention, offering a mosaic of actions during "Red Ribbon Week" - a traditional time in late October for schools to promote healthy and drug free living.

The three high schools each have a different way of fostering safe behaviors: Miramonte focuses on parents, as well as students, Campolindo proposes fun activities to the students, and Acalanes empowers students to talk to other students.

Acalanes High School will involve students in the process of managing the Red Ribbon week themselves. "Students talking to students is the best communication channel when discussing the dangers of drugs and alcohol," says Melody Howe Weintraub, the Parents' Club member in charge of Healthy Choices.

Last year the school's nurse, Dvora Citron, was able to secure a mini-grant and launch the Acalanes Health Council that's composed only of students. "Two dozens students joined last year and they are 60 this year," Citron says. "They are interested in promoting healthy programming on campus, they will be CPR trained and will learn intervention strategies."

The students are planning Red Ribbon Week exhibits at lunchtime and will be conducting an alcohol prevention bingo. "More than the information, what is important is that the students share with each other, and discuss how to act on their own values," adds Citron.

At Campolindo, the Healthy Choices committee headed by Renee Breber and Roxy Klein is planning two informative days for the students. "Tuesday the 27th and Thursday the 29th, student activities will be offered in the Quad at lunch time," explains Breber.

The first activity will be a one-page quiz with facts and myths regarding drugs and alcohol use that will give students the opportunity to enter a raffle. Breber hopes that the students will discuss the quiz and its finding with their parents. "Studies have shown that the most influential people in the life of teens regarding substance abuse behavior are their parents, not their peers," she adds.

Campolindo is also planning an obstacle course where students wear a pair of "fatal goggles" - eyewear that simulates altered perception while intoxicated at various levels. During the week, parents will get information in the daily e-bulletin focused on one of this year's themes: "Lock Your Meds."

At Miramonte an important part of the week focuses on parents.

"We are organizing a Community Forum on Alcohol," explains Lynne Alper, who co-chairs Healthy Choices with Jaime Zaffanella. The forum - "Underage Drinking in Our Community - Myth and Reality" - will be held at the Miramonte Theater on Oct. 27 from 7 to 9 p.m., and will consist of a panel of five speakers who will address different angles of underage drinking and answer questions.

Miramonte principal Adam Clark, Orinda Chief of Police Bill French, Attorney Ted Cassman, who has expertise in liability, and Orinda's Jan Gurley, M.D. will address alcohol intoxication. Emily Justice, from the Center for Human Development, will talk about empowering parents to be more diligent, feeling more confident calling other parents, and saying "no."

Different programs will also be organized in the local elementary and middle schools.

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