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Junior Achievement Expands in Lamorinda

By Sophie Braccini



Volunteer working with middle school students
Picture courtesy of Junior Achievement

It took almost 100 years for Junior Achievement (JA), an economic and business literacy program, to reach Orinda. In 2010, Orinda Intermediate students will benefit from the free training offered by the veteran non-profit.

JA was established in 1916 on the East Coast of the United States as a partnership between the business community, educators and volunteers. They all work together to bring to young people experiential programs teaching the key concepts of work readiness, entrepreneurship and financial literacy. JA reached the Bay Area in 1950 and according to Jenni Beeman, Senior District Manager for JA, "During the 2008-2009 school year, we provided programs to 950 students in Lafayette and Moraga. This year, for the first time since our inception, Orinda schools will be experiencing our programs." Deepika Shah is the parent coordinator for JA at Los Perales Elementary School (LP) in Moraga. "My job is to find two parents volunteer in each 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade class to teach the material to the kids," she says. Shah, who is a Berkeley MBA, believes that exposing kids to business and finance at an early age is of great benefit and she particularly appreciates the fact that JA trains the parents and provides them with material adapted for each age group. "The program proposes units of 5 weeks, during which a volunteer will meet the students once a week for about an hour,"

says Shah, "depending on the children's grade level the program can be about business and community, banking system, zoning, government, and etcetera." LP has been using that program for five years and Shah is looking forward to her son reaching 2nd grade so he can participate.

If the school cannot find enough parent volunteers then JA sends professionals from the business community who want to give pro bono services. "It sounded like a perfect opportunity for the Financial Planning Association," says Jean Gannett, co-owner of Park Place Wealth Advisors in Orinda, "I have enjoyed teaching those children for three years now, and the kids absolutely love it." Gannett believes that it is important to teach kids to be financially responsible. She will be in charge of the teaching at OIS and is looking forward to it.

Gannett convinced her son to teach as well. "It was a great experience for me, too," says Dan Gannett, who has taught in Lafayette and Moraga, "I taught the kids about the cycle of money, the beginning of store management, town planning and zoning. The curriculum prepared by JA was exhaustive and it even contained a booklet for the teachers if they wanted to tie in some aspects of what was learned, such as math, English or social science, to the curriculum."

OIS is scheduled to start offering the training to 8th graders during the next semester. The curriculum chosen for them is called "America Works." It provides students with examples of how business and entrepreneurship affected the economic development of the United States during the 19th century. The program is free to schools.

Junior Achievement is a non-profit entity that has established relationships with large corporate donors; for example, in 2007-2008, both AT&T and Microsoft gave JA \$5 million and many banks are in their \$1 million circle. For more information about JA, go to <http://www.ja.org/>.

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