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Putting the T-E-A-M in Public Speaking

By Cristina Kim



Kristen Plant (back); (L-R) Anirudh Sapra, Kate-Marie Engberg, Phoebe Schmidt Photo Chelsea DeVries

We don't usually think of teamwork when we think of a high school class in public speaking, but for Kristen Plant and her students at Miramonte High School, team spirit is both a method and a great learning experience. "We are a team and we like to look out for each other," Plant states. The Miramonte Public Speaking team competes year round in local tournaments, and has often gone on to State and National events. The public will have an opportunity to see what competitive public speaking is all about when the team showcases some speeches and performances on February 3rd at the Miramonte Theater.

At Miramonte, public speaking doubles as both a very popular elective and a competitive team sport. According to the National Forensic League, Miramonte ranks in the top one percent of public speaking programs in the nation. This year's team is ranked very highly, and expects to qualify again for the State and Nationals.

Miramonte excels in three main areas of competitive speaking: student congress (in which students prepare and debate legislation), team debates, and individual events. This diversity allows students to discuss a myriad of topics and even allows for presentations with a theatrical bent.

In spite of the Miramonte

team's prestigious and competitive reputation, Plant works hard to make sure the class is open to all students. "I want this to be a class any kid can take," Plant says, "if just for one year—to gain life skills." Plant also emphasizes that the word "team" is the theme for all members of the class, rookies and veterans alike. Although it is not obligatory to participate in the weekend competitions, the class's curriculum is shaped around the development of competitive speech skills. Ultimately most students participate, probably due to the supportive and fun environment that Plant provides in the classroom.

Plant is quick to credit the team's success on her smart and focused students. "I see my job as a dream job. It makes me feel excited about the future and our country to work with these bright students in such a supportive community," she states. The class is student driven, and all five periods in which the class meets involve students of mixed ages and levels. This allows the veteran students to tutor and help more inexperienced public speakers.

Phoebe Schmidt, Anirudh Sapra and Kate-Marie Engberg have been taking public speaking since their freshman year. They are the three co-presidents of the Miramonte Public Speaking team, and confirm the powerful and life

changing dynamics of public speaking.

Schmidt credits public speaking with helping her become very efficient at organizing ideas and then presenting them in a coherent way. She also enjoys it. "It's definitely a feeling of camaraderie...it's a special program," she says.

Schmidt is also the captain of the lacrosse team, a Girl Scout, and a participant in "Mock Trial," to name a few of her other activities.

Anirudh, an equally active senior and varsity athlete, feels that public speaking has given him confidence in himself and has prepared him for real life situations such as interviews and proposals. A participant in student congress and a national level extemporaneous speaker, Anirudh appreciates how public speaking has opened his mind to alternative viewpoints. Having prepared for different debates he has learned that, "Even if you don't agree you can still respect and understand the other side."

For Kate-Marie Engberg, public speaking has had an even greater impact on her life. Having never been into acting or performing she was reluctant to participate in public speaking, but doing so allowed her to find her passion for comedic writing and film. She was recently accepted for Film Studies at New York University. "I started writing my own speech...I filmed it and it started my interest in writing and filming. Public speaking was the initial base for that interest," Engberg shares.

While public speaking is generally not a spectator sport, the community is invited to hear a wide array of award-winning speeches on topics ranging from social networking to the energy crisis to The Parent Trap. The event begins at 7:30 p.m. on February 3rd. Tickets are \$5 and are available on the Miramonte Web Store (<http://miramonte.revtrak.net/tek9.asp>) or at the door. Light refreshments will be served after the performance.

Grad Night Theme Announcement at Campolindo

By Sophie Braccini



Theme announcement day at Campolindo in 2009 Photo Colleen Stagg

If you've had children in high school, then you know - Grad Night is a big deal. And at Campolindo High School (Campo), the announcement to seniors of the event's theme is a formal affair. "After finals and at the beginning of the second semester, it is hard to keep the seniors engaged," says Laurie Hoyt, Grad Night co-chair, "the announcement day builds up the excitement and gives them something to look forward to." This year's Grad Night theme will be announced on February 8th.

Margaret Qualls is in charge of the parent effort on announcement day, along with her team of volunteers. "We decorate the entrance of the school, where the seniors will arrive, and G-hall in the theme that was chosen," she says, "it gives them a taste of what Grad Night will be like." Seniors will be given an invitation to the party at the same time. At lunchtime, Campo teachers put on a show just

for seniors.

"I am not sure when, specifically, the skit started but it has been around at least since 2004," says Social Studies teacher Paul Verbansky, "it's a way for teachers and staff to partake in the Grad Night festivities and the skit also lets students see their teachers joyfully make fools of themselves." Verbansky and fellow teacher Lisa Herzig spent weeks writing a script that incorporates some of the theme's characters, elements of the Campo community (often inside jokes for seniors) and some pop culture references, with an adventurous storyline.

"The Grad Night skit allows teachers from all grade levels and subjects to work together along with counselors, administrators and other staff," notes Verbansky, "there aren't too many opportunities that you have the Government teacher standing side-by-side with the Math teacher and the Woodshop teacher,

in front of a group of students; especially not when they're dressed in silly costumes. In times of budget crisis and doom-and-gloom scenarios, it is important to remember what wonderful schools we have in our community and how much positive is around us," he concludes, "the short Grad Night Theme Skit is an example of the dedication the Campolindo staff has to the school and its students. It is a fabulous tradition."

Qualls finds that being involved creates fun relationships as well. "On the Grad Night committee I work with parents I've known for years, some I don't know and parents of kids with whom my boys played when they were in 1st grade," she explains.

Hoyt says a few volunteer positions still need to be filled, "We need a chair for donations, and someone to manage volunteers at the event; both are administrative and organizational positions that can be managed off line," she adds.

In the meantime, other committees are already engaged in preparing the decorations, activities, shows and food that will make Grad Night special. "The reason we are doing this is to create a memorable and safe party for our kids," adds Hoyt, "we want to keep them engaged all night, for that last time in their life when they will be together for fun."

To volunteer, contact Hoyt (lauriehoyt@comcast.net) and co-Chair Val Pettegrew (valpettegrew@sbcglobal.net).

Download "Your" story from www.lamorinda weekly.com

Facebook - To Friend or Not to Friend

By Jean Follmer

To friend or not to friend, that is the question. Facebookers know the routine: So-and-so has sent you a "friend request." If you confirm the person as a friend, you're inviting him into your virtual world. Many Facebookers out there have hundreds of "friends." If adults have trouble knowing where to draw the line on Facebook friends, imagine trying to establish that line if you're a kid. Stanley Middle School recently reported an incident in which an unknown Facebook user sent friend requests to a number of Stanley students.

Posing as Stanley Principal David Schrag, the perpetrator successfully "friended" a number of the students. "Several students had approached me asking if I have a Facebook account," said Schrag, who notified both Facebook administrators and the Lafayette Police Department of the situation. "Facebook was really responsive and they took the page down immediately," said Schrag. Due to Facebook's timely response, the Lafayette Police Department did not need to get involved.

The situation served to raise awareness and increase the dialogue about internet safety for Stanley students. "Anyone who you accept as a friend on Facebook has access to all of your in-

formation," said Schrag.

While some middle school parents feel their children are ready to access social networking sites like Facebook, other parents do not. Stanley parent Gint Federas said his 8th grade daughter does have a Facebook account. Federas said he and his wife "friended" their daughter so they can monitor her Facebook activities. "I just go look at her wall every now and then, maybe once or twice a week," said Federas, and he has addressed a few postings he thought were inappropriate by both his daughter and her friends. Federas said his daughter did receive a friend request from the perpetrator posing as Schrag. When she looked at the impostor's information, she saw it was filled with profanities and clicked the "ignore" button.

Another parent of an 8th grade Stanley student, Kristi Buck, said her daughter does not have a Facebook account. "She does not have one and I personally feel that they're too young. I just think there is too much information available for them to safely navigate at this age. What's hard is you can post comments so conversations can be publicly broadcast. I also think it makes relationships very public when they should be private," said Buck,

adding that she recently set up a Facebook account herself so she can learn to navigate it effectively before she allows her daughter to access the site. Buck was pleased with Stan-

ley's reaction to the situation. "I think David (Schrag) handled it well. He's really good about immediately taking action. The good thing is, now the dialogue is going," she said.

Bisel Crowned Campolindo's Mr. GQ

Robby Bisel Photo Doug Kohen

Robby Bisel was crowned Mr. GQ 2010 in Campolindo's annual pageant in which upper classmen compete in categories including talent and question and answer.

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