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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.

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