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Bullying Prevention Month in Moraga

By Vera Kochan

Mayor Dave Trotter issued a proclamation at the Sept. 26 Moraga Town Council meeting declaring October as Bullying Prevention Month. Bullying comes in many forms, including physical, verbal, sexual and emotional. Research has shown that it affects millions of American children and adolescents. Bullying has a wider reach now that cell phones and the internet are used as weapons to promote hurt and hate. Wendell Baker, co-founder of the Moraga iKind Project, enthusiastically accepted the proclamation. Baker and co-founder, Eric Andresen, "were both working with Scouts for Equality to change the Boy Scouts policy that banned LGBT members. When the policy was changed to allow gay youth in May 2013, we decided to devote our energies to help build a better climate for the youth in town. There was a lot of information online suggesting community-wide bullying prevention programs and very little on what it would look like. We met with Bruce Burns, the Moraga School District superintendent, and the three of us decided we'd start a community-wide program and see what works."

The local iKind program started at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. Baker's community-wide program decided to use the same name and became the Moraga iKind Project, which still works closely with the iKind committee at JM, as well as with groups at Campolindo High School, the Acalanes Union High School District, and other local organizations.

"The vision of the Moraga iKind Project is to promote civility and compassion in our community. Our mission is to promote kindness and courtesy, to foster courage and bravery, based on the belief that empathy and inclusion constitute the foundation on which community is built," Baker said.

The Moraga Chamber of Commerce and town businesses are also encouraged to take the iKind pledge to promote and value kindness; treat all people with respect; show compassion and honesty; demonstrate courage. By becoming a "supporter," iKind will supply free banners and window decals. They will also provide free wrist-bands and refrigerator magnets for businesses to give away to employees and customers.

JM's iKind committee chose Stay KINected as this year's theme. By combining "KIND" and "Connected," they remind everyone of the importance to support their efforts. The Committee includes Leadership and SMILE club students, teachers, staff and adult volunteers.

The C.A.R.E. Program (Compassion, Acceptance, Respect, Equality), was developed by the Diversity Committee of the Acalanes Union High School District. Baker states that "the four high schools use the C.A.R.E. Program, so we decided we'd use it as a basis for programs in the elementary and middle schools so that there is consistent messaging. We've also promoted the idea that high school students should help with C.A.R.E. programs at the middle school and middle schoolers should help with C.A.R.E. programs at the elementary schools."

A free movie event is being sponsored by Moraga iKind and Stay KINected at the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Theater. "Race To Nowhere" is a PG-13 documentary exploring the tragic side of our achievement-obsessed society in regards to our children.

The film screening will be at 7 p.m. Nov. 7, followed by a student discussion panel and ice cream. The event is free, but you must RSVP at www.moragaikind.org.

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