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Moraga schools excel in the Greatest Kindness Challenge

By Vera Kochan



MPD's Cpl. Angela Likos at Donald L. Rheem
Photo Bess Inzeo

The 19th century novelist Henry James was quoted as saying, "Three things in human life are important: the first is to be kind; the second is to be kind; and the third is to be kind."

The Moraga School District's grades TK-5 participated in the nationwide Great Kindness Challenge week Jan. 28 through Feb. 1. In 2018, over 10 million students in nearly 20,000 schools committed over 500 million acts of kindness in 103 countries.

The challenge was presented by Kids of Peace, a global 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization co-founded in 2006 by a high school honor student and an elementary school teacher. It started with a group of neighborhood kids wanting to make the world a better place. In 2011, the program was introduced to three Carlsbad, California elementary schools and from there the kindness movement took off.

The Kids of Peace website stated, "At the heart of The Great Kindness Challenge is the simple belief that kindness is strength. We also believe that as an action is repeated, a habit is formed. As kindness becomes a habit, peace becomes possible," adding, "The Great Kindness Challenge is a grassroots movement that is

making our schools, communities and world a kinder and more compassionate place for all. Working together we joyfully prove that kindness matters."

Throughout the week, various discussions, activities and challenges were presented to the students, such as encouraging kids to play with someone new at recess; greeting each other with high fives and hugs; reading daily quotes ("Sprinkle kindness like confetti!") or watching a powerful video at www.kindnessboomerang.com called "One Day."

Local "celebrities" made daily appearances to the participating schools in the Moraga School District. Camino Pablo Elementary, Los Perales Elementary and Donald L. Rheem Elementary schools were treated to short presentations on the importance of kindness by Moraga School District Superintendent Bruce Burns; Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent Jennifer Baier; Director of Pupil Services Susan Bishop; Moraga Mayor Roger Wykle; Moraga Council Member Renata Sos; Moraga Police Department Cpl. Angela Likos, officers Randy Pacheco, Craig Walker and Jeff Yanga; the Saint Mary's College women's volleyball team and the Cal men's baseball team.

During one appearance, MOFD Capt. Jon Bensley, engineer Chris Mathews, firefighter Andrew Leach, firefighter Travis Dulli and probationary firefighter Thomas Schwedhelm greeted arriving students at Camino Pablo with high fives and stickers proclaiming each recipient a junior firefighter. "We always try to do something with the community to raise awareness," Bensley said. "It's nice to educate the children, and we love public service."

As the firefighters mingled with the students during recess on a gloomy and overcast morning, the kids' beaming smiles brightened the day. Groups of admirers attached themselves to each firefighter and simultaneously asked questions sounding much like little chirping birds. When questioned, "Does anyone want to be a firefighter?" The response was a resounding and unanimous, "Yes!"

Event organizer, Bess Inzeo, Moraga School District's school counselor was very pleased with the results. "This is the first time all of the schools have participated at the same time." She added, "It's been a great week! I've gotten emails from parents about their children continuing the acts of kindness at home."

The Great Kindness Challenge also has a Family Edition. Visit the website at www.GreatKindnessChallenge.org for more information.



Visiting members of MOFD, from left: probationary firefighter Thomas Schwedhelm, firefighter Travis Dulli, engineer Chris Mathews, Capt. Jon Bensley and firefighter Andrew Leach at Camino Pablo Elementary School. Photo Vera Kochan

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