



Published January 24th, 2018

Student journalists write about a lot

By John T. Miller

A pair of student journalists at Acalanes High School have opened up a can of, well, worms, with their December issue exposé of after hours drinking in the student parking lot.

The front-page photo of the high school's Blueprint newspaper shows an accumulation of discarded Coors cans in the foreground along with a slew of cigarette butts littering a corner of the lot on a Monday morning. Juniors Lisi Burciaga and Karen Rosenberg were handed the topic by their journalism teacher Larry Freeman.

"Everyone knew it was going on, but didn't do anything," said Burciaga. "We knew this as students, but it was unverified."

Rosenberg added, "When we started investigating we thought it was worthy of a story. Writing about it brought awareness to the problem."

According to the two writers, their first concern was with the supposed underage drinking and illicit drug use, but that expanded to the litter being strewn in the parking lot and other issues.

The story came out on the day before Winter Break and caused a widescale flurry on social media, especially on Snapchat, where ephemeral posts disappeared shortly after being viewed.

"Many students called us spoil sports and tattle tales," said Rosenberg. "They felt we were just trying to ruin their good times."

Burciaga was excited that the story brought a lot of attention to the newspaper: "It was cool to see people walking down the hallway reading it."

But while it caused a stir on campus, especially with juniors and seniors, the Blueprint writers hoped to trigger a reaction with local authorities, including the Lafayette police and the City Council. Instead, neither the police nor the council acknowledged their efforts.

Acalanes Principal Travis Bell thought the students did an excellent job with the story, saying, "It's not the kind of thing you want to read about your school or to see beer cans on the cover of the school newspaper, but they're reporting on what they're seeing. I hope it can spark a collaborate effort to fix the problem."

Bell felt the police were doing good work. "They didn't find underage drinking or any evidence of wrongdoing, but it seems like there could be a curfew enforced."

Working with the local authorities and the District's Technology and Facilities personnel, Bell is hopeful to find out what the police and the school can and cannot do, and what resources are available, whether it be security cameras, posted signs as to what laws can be upheld, or any other solution.

While Burciaga and Rosenberg have drawn praise for the impact of their article, they have not received any reply from the Lafayette Police and the City Council after their attempts to reach them.

Meanwhile the beer cans continue to pile up in the parking lot over the weekends.

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