

SCHOOLS

OIS Increases Awareness of Problems Facing Those With Disabilities

By DAVID DIERKS
Assistant Editor

From February 6 through 10, Orinda Intermediate School (OIS) held its annual Diverse Abilities Awareness Week (DAAW) to increase the awareness of the struggles those with disabilities face. Anna Tague, the DAAW parent chairperson, said "The goal of the week is to have the kids begin to understand what a person might be challenged by, whether it's a visible or invisible challenge, and to experience that. During the week, they see what it might be like to read aloud by seeing print as a person with dyslexia sees it, or to look in a mirror and try to trace something as if you had a disconnect between your brain and motor ability similar to cerebral palsy. It helps them see how frustrating that is. What would it be like if eight hours a day at school you were like that? What would it be like if your friends weren't accepting or respecting that challenge, or you weren't comfortable sharing that challenge?"

On February 8, OIS held an open house with interactive educational booths and information tables so that the community could see what DAAW was all about. One of the parent volunteers, Robyn Bowen said, "We have information tables which not only educate the kids, but also educate the parents who might come here looking for resources for their children or other family members. So it's almost like a Diverse

Abilities Fair."

Classroom discussions and activities included sensory, auditory and visual processing challenges. Physical education classes during the week were focused on wheelchair basketball, which culminated in a wheelchair basketball game, OIS vs. the Bay Cruisers, a youth wheelchair team from the Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program. Bowen said "On top of the interactive curriculum that the volunteers do, the PE program is also involved. We have a program where we have the kids do their sports in wheelchairs and some of the 8th graders were recruited to play the basketball game against an established wheelchair basketball team. That's one of the really unique things. It's so fun, and it really speaks to the kids. They all come to see that!"

DAAW is a collaboration between OIS staff and the parents club. "I believe that's what makes this such a successful event. Every staff member is involved in some way or another in promoting this to the kids. Our principal is so supportive," Bowen said.

DAAW has been an annual event for close to 10 years. "It predates the majority of the people who attend the school," Tague explains. "As the program developed, the teachers became more and more enthusiastic. They're really an integral part of getting the word out." Bowen added, "I feel very strongly that this is an event that makes a positive difference in our community."



DAVID DIERKS

OIS students found out how difficult it is playing basketball in wheelchairs in a game against the Bay Cruisers during Diverse Abilities Awareness Week.

Orinda Academy Students Help Keep Orinda Creeks Clean and Healthy

By KATHRYN G. MCCARTY
Staff Writer

Orinda Academy students are joining the ranks of the Friends of Orinda Creeks (FOC) on March 23 from 9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m., volunteering to pull non-native invasive plants from a portion of the San Pablo Creek that runs through Orinda.

Jim Luini, president of the Friends says that having such a large group (83 students) is a big help to the FOC. Senior Jeremy Hansen explained, "Our schools' goal is for us to become good citizens by giving back and serving our community. This provides a connection between the school and the community."

According to Luini, the students will learn to identify and remove "invasive plants like English Ivy and Himalayan Blackberry and replant natives." The group believes that this educates students on how healthy creeks mean a healthy water supply.

"It's very important to get the kids interested in the environment, get them involved with the environment," Luini, a 40-year Orinda resident said. Since 1972, "Orinda has changed quite a bit," chuckles Luini. The group enjoys working with a diversity of volunteers from Girl Scouts and high school students to adults who Luini finds, "So full of energy. It's a delight to see that in a community like Orinda."

Luini, a retired engineer (CA-Berkeley 1957) is enthusiastic about the growth of the group. He has been involved with FOC for the last five years.

According to Luini, the creek includes stretches "from behind the Chevron station where it comes out from under the freeway flowing north, to the area behind

the Bank of America where the creek goes back underground, under the business community." Luini explained the long term goal is to make the creek area much more accessible to residents. "The idea is to get rid of the invasive plants and do some work in creating, eventually, a pathway around the creek bank."

Orinda Academy (OA) founder Ron Graydon said the school has included community service as part of its program since the school's inception. Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, he says the school has always believed "students need to give back to the community, help those less fortunate, and experience working environments, as well as helping to preserve the natural environment."

OA sophomore Elie Portnoy, who also volunteers at the George Marks Children's Center said, "Volunteer work gives you a unique perspective." Fellow 10th grader Megan Pulkownik adds, "Doing community service makes me a better person. I feel good when I am doing good."

The FOC believes protection of the city's creeks, including the removal of invasive non-native plants and trash, is important. Like the students, the group's members are volunteers concerned with the health of the Bay Area's water supply, and believe "the health of the creek habitat is closely connected to the health of that watershed." According to the group's website, the water in the creeks in Orinda flows "into two reservoirs, San Pablo to the northwest and Upper San Leandro to the southeast." The site also explains that the group encourages composting.

For more information, visit www.orindacreeks.org.

Miramonte Wrestlers Hit the Mat



TOM SPALDING

Miramonte's Micah Spalding (L) works a cradle for a pin in a match against Dublin High School. The Matadors have been rising in the standings, recently coming in 5th out of 19 teams at a February tournament of the NCS (North Coast Section) of the California Interscholastic Federation.



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