



RITE OF PASSAGE

Sierra Ridge Academy

Newsletter

Summer 2008

Improving the lives of youth

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Program News2
- Community & Customer News ...3
- Ram Page4-5
- Industry News6
- Staff Spotlight7

A SUMMER ODYSSEY THROUGH THE SIERRAS



Odyssey is defined as: "a long wandering marked usually with many changes in fortune."

With ultra-endurance events sweeping the nation and the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing still fresh in our minds, individuals world-wide are pushing their body and mind to the limit.

Improving one's health and challenging one's mind is nothing new to the students at Sierra Ridge Academy (SRA). While over the years ROP has added additional evidence based programs to better serve youth, athletics remains a longstanding tradition and an integral component to ROP's programming. Of the many opportunities that arise for students to challenge their body and mind, one in particular, the Reno-Tahoe Odyssey run relay, had an added bonus as corporate sponsors Intuit and WalMart raised over \$35,000 for local non-profits.

In its fourth year, the Odyssey is the longest relay running event in Nevada at 178 miles. The majority of the proceeds go directly to three organizations, the Angel Kiss Foundation (dedicated to helping families with children who are being treated for cancer), Tahoe-Pyramid Bikeway (a multi-use recreational trail), and the Avon foundation (established to benefit victims of domestic violence).

This year ninety-nine teams from across the country participated in the Odyssey. Six members of SRA along with a group of six from Silver State Academy

represented the Western Region of Rite of Passage. Teams of twelve were split into two vans and each person ran three legs of the 36-leg course. Starting in downtown Reno, the teams ran around rivers, streams and alpine lakes, which included Lake Tahoe and the Truckee River until they finally finished where the race originally began, in Reno.

Certainly one of the more daunting aspects of the relay was having to adapt to the altitude. The course began and

ended at 4,490 feet but reached a maximum elevation of 7,334. For the students who were more accustomed to sea level, this alone was a great achievement. SRA student athlete Taylor, who had previously never left the State of California, was assigned a very difficult leg which happened to fall around 10 o'clock at night.

"It was my second leg and it was all uphill right by the lake. I wasn't sure if I could keep going. What I took away from running the relay were things I can use in my everyday life: teamwork, being steady and pacing yourself, and most importantly, not ever quitting." -ROP student athlete Taylor

Those ROP students who did not participate in the relay supported the event by manning two aid stations along the course. RAM students awaited weary runners with refreshments and words of encouragement. Eric Lerude, Race Director summed it up best at the finish line: "Rite of Passage played an important role throughout the relay and displayed enormous heart and character. They did a great job!"

After enduring the challenge with grit and determination, the ROP Western Region team finished with an overall time of twenty-five hours and in the top third. SRA has already committed to participating in the relay next year and will be ready to tackle the terrain one more time.



Summer Splash

The pool at Sierra Ridge Academy is officially open for business as students enjoy a break from the afternoon heat.

Program News



**From the Desk of...
Vicki Wegener**

Principal, Sierra Ridge Academy

“LET’S GET GROWING”

At Rite of Passage, we have found that nutrition is an essential building block for student success. Studies have indicated time and time again, that healthy, active, and well-nourished children are more likely to attend school and are more prepared and motivated to learn. States across the country have launched numerous initiatives to ensure that schools create an environment that supports students in developing lifelong habits of nutrition and fitness.

One such initiative is the “Garden in Every School” program. The “Garden in Every School” initiative was launched in 1995 and proved to be quite successful. Subsequently, legislators, acknowledging the value of school garden projects enacted several bills that promoted school gardens. These bills established the instructional school garden program, identified school gardens as a way to increase student’s preferences for fruits and vegetables, and authorized grants to promote, develop and sustain instructional school gardens.

In 2008, Sierra Ridge Academy initiated a school garden of their own. Students in the Culinary Arts vocation class have planted and are caring for the school garden with the support and supervision of our Chef, Jeff Zahniser. The students take pleasure in seeing the fruits and vegetables grow from seeds and small plants they have worked so hard in planting. They also like getting out of the classroom and being outside.

Numerous studies have documented the educational efficacy of using the environment as an integrated context of learning. The Department of Education found that over 77% of students in environment based



Students tend to the garden daily.

education programs scored higher than their peers across all standardized tests and had higher grade point averages. Since implementation of the garden project, students have become more attentive in classes and feel more connected to learning.

The garden currently plays host to such succulents as tomatoes, strawberries, eggplant, cantaloupe, cucumbers, and various types of peppers. Students along with Chef Zahniser are looking forward to harvesting and preparing delicious foods from the garden such as eggplant parmigiana and chili.

COMPUTER GENERATED INSPIRATION

In California one of the academic requirements to graduate from high school is to complete coursework from the Creative Arts discipline. Some of these courses include foreign languages, art, drama, art history, and many other related classes developed throughout California school districts.



At Sierra Ridge Academy, in addition to traditional creative arts courses, a Computer Art/Digital Design class is being offered. This course provides a great opportunity for students to combine their artistic abilities with technological skills.

The main focus of the course is to provide students a sophisticated framework with which to channel their true creativity. During the course, students learn the principles and practical applications of digital design. The class also provides the students an opportunity to explore and understand what a career in computer art and digital design is all about. When the students were asked how the class would benefit them in the future their responses varied, but all were positive.

Students’ Final Project: Independence Day

They believed that they would be able to do their own photo processing which would save them money, that they could work for a company that utilized digital design and some were interested in becoming photographers for newspapers and magazines.

The final project and exam of the trimester was creating a collage using a map of the United States of America. The map was made up of pictures the students believed depicted and reflected American patriotism for the celebration of Independence Day. As an added bonus, students can now creatively express many different emotions through computer art and digital design.

SIERRA RIDGE ACADEMY CELEBRATES GRADUATION



Student athlete Joseph G. presents his validation certificate.

Sierra Ridge Academy recently celebrated its final graduation of the 2007-2008 School year. During the past year over 45 SRA students have walked in graduation ceremonies. In that time students have accomplished the following: maintained a 3.3 GPA, 94% success rate on the California high school exit exam, averaged more than 4 hours weekly in evidence-based therapeutic interventions such as Thinking 4 A Change and Pathways. Also, 100% of the graduates and program completions leave the campus enrolled in either high school or college, enlisted in the military or are gainfully employed. The final graduating class of 2008 was surrounded by family and friends as

they celebrated their accomplishments with Guest Speaker Ray Weathers of the Phoenix Suns delivering the commencement address.



Sierra Ridge Academy Color Guard

Sierra Ridge Academy like all Rite of Passage programs is “dedicated to improving the lives of youth” and continues to strive to be the best program in the state of California. In the fall of 2008 Sierra Ridge Academy will unveil its new athletic fields including new football and soccer fields, sports courts, cross country course, track and family picnic area. The new athletic complex will be a welcome addition to Sierra Ridge Academy’s already thriving campus.

Community & Customer News

“BULLFROGS KEEP ON SWIMMING”

Sierra Ridge Academy teamed up with local high schools to ensure the school swim teams continued success during the 2008 season. With the delay of construction on the \$1 million highly anticipated pool project,



The Big Dig-Construction delays opening of Calaveras high school swimming pool.

both Calaveras and Bret Harte high school swimmers were “left high and dry” and without a place to practice.

When SRA Program Director David Harper heard news of the construction setback, he contacted Brett Harte Union High School District Superintendent, Michael Chimente and offered SRA’s newly remodeled swimming

pool as a temporary solution. While not the one million dollar aquatic facility the high school athletes and staff were hoping for to kick off the 2008 season, SRA’s pool was able to accommodate the entire swim team. The swimming pool has become a tremendous asset to the ROP campus. Hundreds of youth have learned how to swim, benefitted from exercise, enjoyed a break from the heat, and finally it has helped students develop a positive mental attitude and improve self-esteem.

The Superintendent thanked SRA for its generosity and support. “Rite of Passage provided our students the opportunity to practice and compete in their swim season by utilizing their pool during the reconstruction of Brett Harte’s facility. The support by the ROP staff and students in adjusting their schedules to accommodate the swim team demonstrated ROP’s commitment to the community,” stated Michael Chimente, Brett Harte Union High School District Superintendent.



SRA’s newly remodeled swimming pool became home to the Bullfrogs during construction.

For ROP, it was important to lend a hand to the local high schools, you never know where the next Michael Phelps will come from. He just might be in our backyard. SRA students hope to compete in swimming in the near future and join the ranks of aquatic superstars.

GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY.....

Sierra Ridge Academy students have logged nearly 7,000 hours of community service this year, but student contributions in community development aren’t all that ROP is offering. Staff have been assisting in community service opportunities as well, developing the staff-student culture and accomplishing some great feats in the Sierra foothills.



ROP volunteers assist with therapeutic-recreational horseback riding for children and adults with special needs at MDC.

Staff members often look forward to the opportunity of chaperoning community service outings; embracing the chance to interact with students in new settings. Paul Gomez, Group Leader, utilizes community service to discuss the meaning of community with his students. “How is it established?” he asks, and “What keeps it a positive group instead of a negative one?” His answers range, he admits, but “Pushing students to challenge what they traditionally know as a community, allows them to think about establishing the same framework when they return home.”

Each Tuesday, staff and students travel to San Andreas to lead a game of bingo at the Senior Center. Students are able to interact with the residents as well as play board games and tell stories.

It is a two hour event that many of the residents look forward to all week. “It’s great to be able to serve the community in this way. Additionally, our students take valuable lessons from their time in service. It helps them build confidence in various situations,” says Gary Petty, Unit Manager.

Thursdays, staff and students travel to Angels Camp where they assist at the Mounted Dreams Center (MDC), a non-profit Equine center that provides recreational equine experiences to children and adults with special needs in order to enrich physical and emotional development.

“Working with the kids at MDC was very rewarding for me,” says Randy Williams, Group Leader. “The service that MDC provides is amazing and is important for our students to witness. Our involvement in service at MDC shows our interest in becoming a true participant in the community, not just an occupant.”



The residents are excellent role models and enjoy getting to know the RAMS.

SRA is diligently accumulating time towards its annual goal of 20,000 hours spent in the community. Staff and students alike look forward to continued opportunities to give and to grow in the area.



HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

.....and so it criticized
 each flower,
 this supercilious seed;
 until it woke one
 summer hour,
 and found itself a weed.
 - Mildred Howells,
 The Different Seed

LABOR OF LOVE Students tend to the garden and watch over its progress. By taking responsibility of the garden, students become more connected to learning in general.



COMPUTER ART

Students in digital design create a collage for the celebration of Independence Day.



RE-TIRE, NOT A CHANCE

Students are eager to take part in SRA's vocational training program-- automotive technology.



EUREKA! After 178 miles personal fortunes were found-strength, will, and determination.



THE FINISH LINE is sometimes merely the symbol of victory. All sorts of personal triumphs take place before that point.



ROP students and staff race to the finish at the Reno-Tahoe Odyssey.



ROP FINDS WAYS TO GIVE BACK - Students learn to respect the environment during the Feeney Park Clean-Up Project.



BINGO
Student root seniors on during their weekly tournament.



I'D RATHER BE RIDING!
SRA students learn a great deal from working with special needs children at the Mountain Dream Center in Angels Camp, CA.



IN OUR BACKYARD- SRA students and staff teamed up to take part in the "Tahoe Sierra Century" ride. 100 miles of incredible scenery as well as challenging terrain.



Years of research suggest that at-risk youth and their families have multiple needs and interrelated problem behaviors that are not likely to be successfully addressed by a single-response or stand-alone initiative. In an effort to respond to and address the needs of at-risk youth, Rite of Passage's community-based programs focus on comprehensive service delivery that addresses multiple needs through a broad-based continuum of care. Currently, Rite of Passage serves over 500 male and female youth in non-residential, community-based programs throughout the country.

Community-based programs link youth and families to a variety of services within their own neighborhoods or in areas much closer to home. They may enable low-risk offenders to avoid associations with high-risk delinquent youth, and they may also help offenders avoid the stigma of institutionalization. Furthermore, these programs are often cost-effective solutions for servicing delinquent youth (Austin, Johnson and Weitzer, 2005).



THE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION IN COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS



The interventions and strategies Rite of Passage offers in its community-based programs are based on the most current research on reducing recidivism. Specifically, the company adheres to the "principles of effective intervention" as identified by scholars in corrections through hundreds of studies; these principles can be summarized as: risk, need, treatment, and fidelity (Latessa, 2006). Recent research in the field of corrections has indicated that, as with residential correctional facilities, community non-residential programs are most effective when they follow these principles (Lowenkamp, Pealer, Smith, and Latessa, 2006).

How does Rite of Passage put these principles in practice in its community-based programs? Used in conjunction with motivational interviewing, the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT),

an objective risk-needs assessment, identifies the low to moderate offenders who benefit most from community-based services. The results of the assessment also target the criminogenic needs and dynamic risk factors of these youth, which provides a focus for cognitive behavioral therapeutic approaches for treatment. To address fidelity, Rite of Passage continually evaluates the effectiveness of all these various components through Key Performance Indicators, extensive program data that monitors program outcomes and effectiveness and enables the program to do less of what doesn't work and more of what does.

A VARIETY OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

Rite of Passage's community non-residential programs currently provide transition and aftercare services for youth exiting residential placement in addition to providing alternatives to detention or secure placement for low-risk offenders. This menu of services includes, but is not limited to the following:

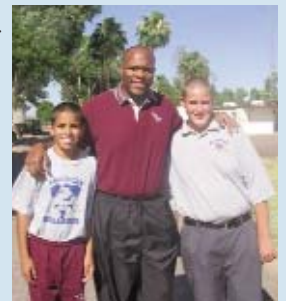
Parole Tracking and Mentoring. Rite of Passage provides client monitoring services that include community-based case management and support to ensure parole compliance for youth. Clients receive mentoring, tracking, family counseling and crisis counseling designed for a successful transition into the community. These services can be "backed in" to the residential facilities to provide treatment programs -- such as Aggression Replacement Training (ART), Active Parenting, or cognitive behavioral therapy -- and to enable youth to become employed or enrolled in education before exiting the secure placement. Further support is given to the youth by urinalysis testing and counseling services if the tests come back positive for substances.

Female Responsive Transition and Aftercare. Rite of Passage also provides female responsive transition and aftercare services for young women. Staff provide assistance and guidance for locating jobs and housing to achieve economic independence. In addition, staff help the young women who may be assuming parenting responsibilities along with other challenges related to family reunification. Many youth are also linked to appropriate mental health professionals within their communities.



Evening Reporting Centers. The reporting programs provide an "event-based" curriculum that includes dynamic programming, speakers and activities. Cognitive behavioral therapy helps students transition back into the community and into the world of work or educational institutions and promotes a healthy life style through skill building. Staff also partner with community resources to provide a continuum of care that addresses all of the youth's needs. To promote healthy families, the program assists parents in increasing their abilities to establish a healthy family structure, provide for the appropriate supervision of their children, and show the needed emotional support to their children.

Intensive Case Management. This service addresses youth with multiple needs including mental health conditions, drug and alcohol use and behavioral challenges. Staff experienced in youth parole, transitional services and counseling provide support and advocacy for the youth and his/her family and become age-appropriate role models. Staff deliver services during two to three weekly client contacts, which take place within a youth's home, school or place of employment.



Rite of Passage strives to provide a hopeful and positive approach to community non-residential services that focus on improving family functioning and empowering the youth to live successfully in the community. We believe that even though a youth's behavior has had a negative impact on his/her own life, the family and the community, we can provide the youth with the tools necessary to succeed.

Works Cited:

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Staff Spotlight

EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH

March



Alexander Dominguez- Coach Counselor

Despite only having worked for Rite of Passage since January, it came as no surprise to his peers at Sierra Ridge Academy to see CC Dominguez being honored as the March Employee of the Month.

CC Dominguez's leadership style is palpable and his efforts are unmatched as a new coach. Simply stated, he leads by example. From 3-Mile runs and double-time line movements to classroom and vocational involvement, CC Dominguez has fully participated in each program element alongside the students. His devotion to setting a positive example for both staff and students alike doesn't stop when he's off the clock though. Frequently you'll catch him on a motivational endurance run during his breaks.

CC Dominguez is no stranger to dealing with confrontational situations and working under stressful conditions thanks to his nearly 8 years of experience as an Emergency Medical Technician and more than 15 years of experience in law enforcement. As a CHP and correctional officer he had the opportunities to work in specialized assignments such as street crime suppression, narcotics, and swat. In addition, he has completed his Advanced POST Certificate.

CC Dominguez's efforts have been further recognized this past May by being promotion to Group Leader.

April



Dathan Miller- Group Leader

GL Miller began at ROP in February of 2007 as a Coach Counselor in our Intake Orientation Training Program where he spent nearly 10 months before setting his eyes on another sight: Coaching the Sierra Ridge Academy 2007/2008 Wrestling Team. He previously coached wrestling teams throughout the state and in his first season with SRA he assisted in leading two student-athletes to the Masters Sac-Joaquin Sectional Tournament and qualifying one of them for the 2008 State Tournament.

GL Miller has an Associate of Arts degree from Lassen Community College and while he was a student, he also wrestled for the college. Congratulations GL Miller, we're proud to have you as a part of our team!

May



Bobby Watson- Unit Manager

For the two years prior to working for ROP, UM Watson served as a Trauma Technician for the Carson Valley Medical Center as well as holding a part time job as a snowboarding instructor. Then in 2006, after realizing that he wanted to work with youth, he began his career with Rite of Passage where he started as a Q-House Coach Counselor. At that time he was able to combine his passion for being out on the slopes with his new commitment to working with kids because the particular house he worked at was responsible for assembling a ski team each winter. After his second ski season was over he made the transfer to Sierra Ridge Academy where he began his progression up the ROP ladder by coming on as a

Group Leader for the Intake Orientation Training program.

UM Watson excels at motivating students through structure and consistency. He states that "Many of our students have lived their entire lives without a structured environment. Providing that environment to students and showing them that it is nothing to be afraid of is the first step in changing their behavior for the better."

UM Watson was recently recognized for his dedication and accomplishments by being promoted to the Unit Manager of Lassen Dormitory.

June



Joseph Blanson- Group Leader

GL Joseph Blanson is entering into his sixth year at Rite of Passage, Sierra Ridge Academy. GL Blanson earned his Associate of Arts degree, specializing in Sociology, from San Joaquin Delta College in 1994. He has a great deal of experience working in group homes and with athletic teams, and particularly enjoys being an assistant football coach. His professionalism and dedication to improving the lives of his students is evident from his passion and strong commitment to ROP's mission. GL Blanson is a professional, highly regarded role model and mentor to both students and staff.



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Sierra Ridge Academy,

*Superior Court of California
County of San Bernardino*

**MICHAEL A. KNISH
COMMISSIONER OF THE SUPERIOR COURT**

I am Superior Court Commissioner presiding over a juvenile delinquency calendar in San Bernadino, and I wanted to write to you concerning a young man who is assigned to my caseload. I had the pleasure of meeting him in February, when he came to court on a review hearing. What a difference your program has made in his life! He previously was plagued with problems-substance abuse, violence, lack of motivation, anger, and gang involvement. Now he is interested in a vocation-auto mechanics-and a sport, and he has a desire to complete his education.

He has failed in previous probation and placement dispositions, and he was on the road to prison. Your program has given him a chance and directed him to a more hopeful future. In light of the changes I saw in him, I would recommend graduation/validation at the appropriate time. Thank you for the work you have done.

Sincerely,

Michael Knish
Superior Court Commissioner