

Godwin students learn 'rule of law' from bar association

By Eileen Mellon

Students at Godwin High School recently learned how the law applies to them and how it forms the basis of behavior within a society, through an interactive experience called the Rule of Law, presented Oct. 10 by the Henrico County Bar Association.

The program is designed to spotlight the role of law as the foundation for communities of opportunity and equity; its goal is to teach young people to understand and appreciate the foundational principles embedded in the rule of law, without which democracy cannot exist.

The event allowed more than 400 seniors to be engaged and have an interactive experience aside from merely reading textbooks or taking notes., Godwin High School Social Studies Department Chair Anna Bryant said.

"It was one of those experiences that get kids engaged about what their government is," Bryant said. "They are the voters of tomorrow and will determine what our government looks like. They are the law-abiding citizens that put people into place that will guide themselves and others. Now it makes more sense, and they can see the big picture."

Tony Pham, the moderator of the Rule of Law event and secretary of the

Henrico County Bar Association, believes that the rule of law provides each person the opportunity to succeed in life. After attending a Rule of Law presentation in the city, Pham realized the program was a valuable tool and one that should be offered to the students in Henrico.

"It really opened my eyes that there were children out there who didn't understand the concept of law and this was a valuable chance for a one-on-one opportunity," said Pham. "The idea generated such buzz in the city that many faculty members were proactive and asked the Henrico Bar Association about the event."

By presenting students with knowledge about law and its role, Pham and bar association members sought to provide students with the power to use the law to their advantage. The association held its first Rule of Law event at Pocahontas Middle School last year, and members were excited to expand the program to high school students this year, after Godwin officials contacted them.

Accomplished speakers and members from the three separate branches of government presented the event and held discussions with students about their role in America's system of governance.

Justice Cleo Powell of the Supreme

said.

Students were presented with scenarios that many of them face in their daily lives, such as routine traffic stops, search and seizure and judicial cases that affect them. The discussion opened the door for a back-and-forth dialogue and allowed the students to actively engage with professionals in the field in a comfortable setting.

"If the volunteers were only able to get through two out of the 15 fact patterns presented, that's a successful day because it means the students were asking questions. It means we did what we set up to do, which was to get these kids talking to each other about the state of government and getting them involved to feel like they're in the moment, so they walk away with something valuable," Pham said.

The vision and understanding of democratic ideals can become obscured by personal and group interests and beliefs, racial and ethnic backgrounds, cultural norms and traditions and socio-economic levels, Pham said. The rule of law prepares students to live in an integrated society in which public service, civic action, social justice and equality are respected.

Bryant said that students often don't see their connection to the judicial system and government on a larger scale, and this event changed that.

"Students are not an outlet doing their own thing as individuals," said Bryant. "We live in a connectational society, and what happens here affects you and others. This is one of the last chances they have to see how they influence government and government influences them."

The Henrico Bar Association hopes to hold the event every year at high schools throughout the county to continue to provide information and share knowledge about the virtue of government with more students.

"The students have opportunities," said Pham. "They should cherish them and how these laws affect our lives on an everyday basis."

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- Danai Kefalas
Godwin High School senior

Court of Virginia, House of Delegates member John O'Bannon (73rd District), Roderick C. Young, Esq. of the United States' Attorneys' Office, Richmond Sheriff C.T. Woody, Henrico County Police officials and attorneys joined forces to shed light on the powerful role that the soon-to-be adults will have in their government.

"Hearing it from someone official made it more of a serious issue and made it different from just hearing it from a teacher or parent," said senior Danai Kefalas. "It made us think about it more. A lot of times, people don't know what the rules are and they hear it from a friend and it can get misconstrued. But at the event we got it from the best source of information."

Many of the students soon will be transitioning from high school to college - and from juveniles to adults - and seeing the 'face' of government removes them from the security that the four walls of high school can have, said Pham, a former prosecutor for the City of Richmond.

"The crimes stayed the same, but the people being charged were getting younger and younger, and after a while it pulls on you," said Pham. "I wanted to figure out if there was something else we could do to reach out to these kids before they have to face the police or a prosecutor. The purpose is to reach out and get them to appreciate the rule of law, but also to give the kids a sense of hope."

Among the highlights of the day - and among the most effective parts of the event - were the individual breakout sessions, during which groups of about 30 students were partnered with attorneys and law enforcement officials in classrooms for smaller and more intimate discussions.

"The students really gained a valuable insight. It places a human side and aspect to a very philosophical concept, and instead of reading about it, they have it right in front of them," Pham

Hermitage student named to U.S. Army All-American Marching Band



Hermitage High School tenor sax player Danny Santos (pictured) was named to the 2014 U.S. Army All-American Marching Band Oct. 22 during a ceremony at the school.

Santos is one of 125 musicians and color guard members from the United States who earned spots on the band, which will showcase its talent during a halftime performance at the nationally broadcast U.S. Army All-American Bowl in San Antonio, Tex., on Jan. 4, 2014. Band members are selected not just because they excel in music and performance, but because they embody the same values of Army soldiers, such as loyalty and integrity.

Local soldiers presented Santos with an Army All-American Bowl jacket during last month's ceremony.

"The U.S. Army has a distinguished musical history," said Mark Davis, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for marketing. "It takes great skill, teamwork and dedication to be a successful band member, just as it does to be an Army soldier. Only the strongest wear the Army colors, which is why we are proud to honor all of our 2014 U.S. Army All-American Band members and congratulate each of them on their selection."

Glen Allen High School

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