

Essay contest

Drug coalition names winners

The Fountain Hills Coalition announced on Monday the winners to its high school "Staying Connected with your Parent" essay contest.

The first place winner was Ian Ooley followed by Jenna Ingram (second place) and Curtis Martinez in third.

Honorable mentions included Max Aguero, Rita Canales, Vincent Carfagno, Brianna Garcia, Ryan Gasbarro, Michael Gashwytewa, Jason Griffo, Konlin Jones, Tyler Pasquale, Kelly Ranft, Ben Tews, Josh Tant, Sarah Traylor and Nichole Van Boeckel.

"I'm so proud of our community," said Carole Groux, the coalition's executive director.

"Having our school, town leaders and businesses partners in this project, and 260 youths participate, was amazing to see.

"We are assured that at least that number of our teens put thought into this important aspect of development, being connected in their family."

Students were asked to write an essay up to 750 words on "the importance of staying connected with their parents."

"This was totally voluntary for the students," said Dwight Johnson, the coalition's parent sector leader.

"We were expecting a great number of entrants due to the generosity of our many business spon-



Ian Ooley, center, was first place winner in the Fountain Hills Coalition's recent essay contest. Jenna Ingram, right, took second place and Curtis Martinez placed third.

sors. We were able to offer a combination \$500 cash/gift card first prize, \$100 Sami Fine Jewelry gift card second prize, \$50 Sami gift card third prize and then \$25 prizes to 14 honorable mention students."

All 260 participants received a free Wendy's Frosty compliments of Jesse Vezey, owner of Wendy's on Shea.

The judges for the contest included Mayor Jay Schlum, Susan Schmidt (eighth grade English teacher), former Mayor Wally Nichols, Jerry Traylor (motivational speaker), Mike Scharnow (editor of *The Fountain Hills Times*),

and Pastor Bill Good (Presbyterian Church in Fountain Hills).

"I was amazed by the writing talent of these students, said Mayor Jay Schlum. "They wrote so well and expressed themselves beautifully in these very emotion-filled essays."

FHHS Principal Tom Lawrence said, "Our English department really supported this contest.

"The teachers really encouraged and motivated the students to participate."

Business sponsors included Loving Family Dental, Sami Fine Jewelry, Community Foundation,

Lisa Murray-RE/MAX Sun Properties, Sheri Patton-American Family Insurance, Phil's Filling Station, Redendo's Pizzeria, Stop & Go Traffic School, Shawn White-Sternfels & White Law Office, Todd Russell-Meridian Bank and Jesse Vezey, owner of Wendy's.

The coalition's mission is "Through community-wide collaboration, Fountain Hills will work together to reduce substance abuse among youth ages 12-18 and, over time, among adults."

Any questions regarding the coalition can be directed to 480-639-0519 or FHCoalition@me.com.

Ooley's winning essay: Staying connected

(Editor's Note: Following is the first-place essay written by sophomore Ian Ooley.)

How often do you consider the valuable experience your parents can give you? With all of the time they have had to learn from mistakes, they possess a lot of knowledge. With this knowledge they have a desire for you to be successful. Parents love their children and strive to help them become prepared for a life of their own. A strong connection with parents can make the task simpler.

It is important to stay connected with your parents as you strive for independence for a number of reasons. First is that parents are a major influence

in your life. When you are young they make decisions of what your environment will be and all the little aspects of your life down to what you eat.

Hopefully we pick up good habits just by observing them all of our lives. Your parents are your earlier role models. You begin imitating and modeling yourself off "Daddy" or "Mommy" when you are small. There should be no reason to not continue patterning your life off the good decisions your parents make in life.

As you grow up you want your parents to be proud and give you their approval. From their experience parents know and want what is best for their children. They always try

helping and assisting you in any way possible. As teens we need to remember that parents aren't trying to be nosey and pushy when they want to stay in touch with us; they want to help us succeed.

I personally stay connected with my parents in many ways. First, we practice the simplest but perhaps strongest way to stay connected - eating meals together regularly. My parents and I eat breakfast and dinner together every day; we would probably have lunch together also if they weren't working and I wasn't at school.

When we all get home we ask about how our days went. They pay special attention to how my classes were that day. They ask specific questions; I can't just say "fine" and be done. I know I can tell them anything and we can work through it together.

Something I love about my family is that we all laugh together, which helps release stress and keeps us all happy. We laugh at stupid things and occasionally at one of our expenses, but we try to never be mean.

Another easy way to stay close is helping me with my homework. Even if I finish it before they get

home, they will check it and help me improve. We study together for tests, and I am helping them to remember some of their high school curriculum.

We also spend some weekend time together. Usually we go out to lunch on Saturdays. We frequently watch a DVD together on Sunday nights. My parents and I also still play games together. I am champion at Uno, but my mom still has fun trying.

Sometimes the best family time is when you can get away. We take a great family vacation at least once a year. The trip is usually to Disney and we have a wonderful time, whether it is for two days or a week.

Staying connected to your parents is a great habit to exercise. Teens and young adults yearn for freedom and independence; however, having such a close bond with your parents enables you to use their guidance in planning for such freedom while at the same time enjoying an environment of love, safety, fun and support.

These are important ingredients for future success. I know that I'll keep connected with my parents and continue to benefit from our relationship.