

Schools

Khalilian speaks, inspires FHHS students

By Michael Scharnow
Times Editor

The student body at Fountain Hills High School was recently inspired by one man.

He wasn't found in the classrooms' history books or down on the football field.

Johan Khalilian was brought to campus courtesy of student government and the Fountain Hills Coalition to spread some positive motivation among impressionable teenagers.

Khalilian is an internationally known speaker

who also works for the non-profit community program called CANDO in Chicago.

The aspiring actor typically talks about such topics as leadership, character, healthy choices, withstanding peer pressure, abstinence, masculinity and faith.

To date he has spoken to more than 200,000 young men and women, encouraging them to dream big, to hold true to their values and to become agents of change in an increasingly complex world.

In two separate talks at the high school, Khalilian focused on motivation and

chasing dreams, urging the high schoolers to make a difference in the world.

All good talks include visual aids, so Khalilian grabbed two volunteers to run a race around the gym.

The only trouble was, one student was blindfolded, having to depend on shouts from the crowd to hopefully not run into a wall.

"As we push through life, find things out, sometimes it feels like you have a blindfold on and you have to follow others' directions," he told the enthusiastic and attentive crowd.

"And there are always those voices trying to get the person in the blindfold to go a different direction.

"You can push past what you see and create something new. How many of you are willing to push through with new dreams?"

The youthful Khalilian easily connected with the local teens – cracking jokes, talking about his rough childhood upbringing and mocking well-known songs.

Khalilian, who has appeared on "The Tyra Banks Show" twice and the "Today" show, warned the students about media influences – heavy advertising,

etc.

"People are always trying to sell something, trying to take as much money from our pockets as they can," he said. "We live in a world fighting for our attention."

Khalilian said different world leaders have effectively used slogans and repeated phrases to influence entire generations.

He added, "Hitler once said, 'How fortunate are the leaders that men do not think.'

"Let's start thinking for ourselves.

"Hitler had a very specific message of hate, but he got an entire country to follow him. As you sit in those seats, are you thinking your own thoughts?"

"Let's recapture our minds. Are you willing to grasp that and not just be a follower?"

Khalilian told the teens that their choices are important. They can choose to make the classroom or their homes, for example, healthy places or unhealthy ones.

"Every choice affects not only you but everyone around you," he said.

"Your choices today will affect you 10 years from now.

"I'm crazy enough to think that what I'm doing right now makes a difference.

"I see not just teenagers, but I see doctors, mothers,



Johan Khalilian engaged the students at Fountain Hills High and encouraged them to chase dreams.

Nobel Peace Prize winners....Your hearts are full of love.

"Do you see that reflection in the mirror? My hope is that deep inside you know who you are and whose dreams matter.

"Are you crazy enough to believe you can make a

difference?"

He urged the students to shout out their answers, and with that the talk ended to thunderous applause.

Coalition leaders said they heard many positive comments from faculty and students about Khalilian's talk and his message.



Johan Khalilian used two student volunteers from the audience to help prove one his points.