

*Safe Homes Network***Sweet gingerbread winners**

There were plenty of sweet winners in the first ever Gingerbread House Contest organized by the Fountain Hills Coalition's Safe Homes Network.

The Safe Homes Network of Fountain Hills is a group of concerned parents and citizens who have taken a pledge not to allow the consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs to youths, under the age of 21, in their homes.

"We are taking a proactive step to protect our children from the harmful, often deadly, consequences of alcohol and illegal drug use," said Maria Perreault, who directs the network.

The gingerbread homes were displayed at the Community Center along with other festive decorations during December.

"I heard nothing but glowing reviews on the creativity, execution and overall idea of the contest," Perreault said.

"We had a total of 24 gingerbread homes enter the contest."

There were three different categories for the contest – family, teen (ages 13-18) and youths (ages 12 and under).

Alas, not everyone could win, so three judges selected first, second and honorable mentions.

Judges were Mayor Jay Schlum, Alchemy chef Paul O'Connor and Sandi Thompson, chair of the Public Art Committee.

The Christine Porter family was given first place for families, winning a \$100 gift certificate to All-American Sports Grill, bowling and shoe rental package at Fountain Bowl and a \$15 La Scale Creamery gift card.

Carli Van Valkenberg was the winning teenager, taking home \$150 in cash.

Youth Matthew Troller also walked away with \$150 in cash.

The John Belt family took second place for families, winning a \$50 gift certificate to All-American Sports Grill and a \$25 La Scale Creamery gift card.

Emily Owens was awarded second place for teens (\$75 cash), while Cooper Weisbach finished second for youths (also \$75 cash).

Honorable mentions went to the Devri Quintana family, teens Jacqueline



The Porter family collaborated on this first-place gingerbread house for the holiday contest.

and Jennifer Simmons and youth Kevin Perreault.

"I want to thank everyone who participated and those who helped with the contest," Perreault said.

"Look for us and the contest again next year."

Safe Homes Network has tripled its membership since January 2010. There are more than 350 families/parents who have taken the pledge to not serve alcohol to those under the legal age of 21.

"Recent studies show that children as young as age 12 are beginning to experiment with alcohol and marijuana use," Perreault said.

"As a parent, it is our job to protect and support our children as they navigate through adolescence. On our own, that can be difficult to do.

"The Safe Homes Network Pledge is to help encourage normal, healthy behavior in our teens, which excludes the use of alcohol, illegal and prescription drugs."

Information: www.safe-homesfh.org.



Carli Van Valkenberg is all smiles with her home.



Matthew Troller hangs out by his award-winning gingerbread home.