

Monday, December 13th, 2010 | Posted by [Mike Roberts](#)

Youth STARS shine bright at Vision Coalition ceremony

Vision Coalition Youth STARS twinkled at a red carpet recognition event at Lakehills Church Friday night. The awards ceremony above El Dorado Hills Town Center was loaded with pomp and circumstance, all geared to acknowledging the good kids in our community.

All together, 34 of El Dorado County youth received recognition. The winners came to the stage while a summary of their leadership, mentoring, participation and volunteerism was read to the roughly 150 attendees, including various dignitaries. Families whooped and stomped with unabashed pride when “their baby” approached the stage.



VISION COALITION leaders DJ Peterson and Raeann Jones, far right, get ready to present Youth STAR awards to outstanding young people. Village Life photo by Mike Roberts

“It’s important to recognize young people for their contributions to their communities, schools, organizations and especially for their service to others,” said DJ Peterson, Vision Coalition of El Dorado Hills director, magician and master of ceremonies for the STAR award presentations. “When kids are engaged in community activities and feel that their efforts are worthwhile, they’ve got a much better chance of avoiding obstacles like drugs, alcohol and tobacco.”

STAR award winner, musician and composer Kyle Schafer opened the recognition portion of the evening with an inspirational piano and vocal piece.

The awards were presented by Vision board members Dr. Roger Taylor, Rick Deubel, Sandy Kukkola, William Wild and Luz Zeagler.

To add to the tribute, District 10 Assemblywoman Alyson Huber’s staffer Elizabeth Kim presented each award winner with a handsome and framable certificate of recognition from the state Assembly.

The award winners were nominated by members of the community. Many are National Honor Society members, Golden Star Students, Safe School ambassadors, peer counselors, color guard members ... all were tireless volunteers. They wrote grants, built community gardens, fed the homeless, held town hall meetings, publicly spoke, organized concerts, volunteered at shelters, sat on advisory councils, formed art programs, participated in student leadership, mentored younger students, created video public service announcements, assisted special needs students, volunteered at local hospitals, attended leadership events and much more.

The organizations that benefit from their efforts reads “All that’s good about El Dorado County.” The benefits actually spill over into the entire region: Faithful Stewards, Boys and Girls Club, Hands for Hope, Reach Out and Teach, various church groups, the El Dorado Hills Teen Center, the Food Bank, WEB and LINK Crews in the middle schools, the Grace Foundation, the El Dorado County Youth Commission and others.

Peterson reported reductions in teen binge drinking, episodes of drinking and driving and drinking in the last 30 days, according to the California Student Survey.

“We’re seven times more effective in stopping drugs and alcohol than communities without these programs.” he said. “These are the most effective tools we have.”

Peterson was effusive in his praise for the kids, and also has a kind word for their parents. “You must be doing something right.”

Vision Board President Roger Taylor also praised the parents, adding “What you have in front of you are the next generation of leaders. This is our future.”

The Vision Coalition functions largely behind the scenes, supporting organizations and activities that build the attitudes, skills, knowledge and experience to help kids make sound decisions as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Over the past five years, the coalition has grown by partnering with schools, parents, law enforcement, health professionals and others. They train organizations that work with youth, and provide direct funding through “mini-grants” to more than 25 local organizations.

Funding comes from donations and grants, the two most notable being the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Sierra Health Foundation’s REACH Program.

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Award winners

Alex Bennett, Oak Ridge senior
Andie Horning, Oak Ridge senior
Ashley England, Marina Village Middle School eighth-grader
Carole Hewitt, Shenendoa High school
Dana Vierra, Oak Ridge sophomore
Dane Neves – Markham Middle School
Elizabeth Kasirye, Oak Ridge sophomore
Fanny Kuang, Oak Ridge senior
Gabby Zeagler, Oak Ridge sophomore
Grace Benguerel, Oak Ridge sophomore
Greg Kirby, Pleasant Grove Middle School eighth grader
Haley Adams, Oak Ridge senior
Jaclyn Fields, Pleasant Grove Middle School eighth grader
Jessica Parlin, Ponderoso High School senior
Johanna Aguilar, Charter Community School senior
Jordynn Lee Wood, Oak Ridge junior

Kasra Behizad, Oak Ridge senior
Katrina Lund, Oak Ridge senior
Kirsti Buckendorf, Oak Ridge senior
Kyle Schafer, Oak Ridge junior
Maddy Hames, Oak Ridge sophomore
Marisa Ciccozzi, Oak Ridge sophomore
Marissa Flickenger, Home School sixth grader
Nick Archibald, Marina Village eighth grader
Rachel Boyd, Oak Ridge sophomore
Rachel Thorley, Oak Ridge sophomore
Raeven Barrett, Lilliput Children Services sophomore
Rily Bogar, Oak Ridge freshman
Ryan Parisek, Marina Village seventh grader
Sarah Meyer, Smith Flat High School junior
Sarah Walker, Golden Springs High school senior
Shelby Glaister, Pleasant Grove eighth grader
Taja Davis, Oak Ridge senior
Tamara Maximovich, Oak Ridge sophomore

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