

Students take on Challenge Day

By Erin Borla
Correspondent

Sisters High School sophomores had the opportunity to participate in Challenge Day last month. This program, a nonprofit based in the San Francisco Bay area, helps young people connect through powerful, life-changing programs in their schools and communities.

The program on a larger level is designed for grades 7-12 and uses highly interactive and energetic activities run by two trained leaders. Facilitators guide 100 youth and 25 adults through a carefully designed model of ways people separate from each other and identify tools to create connection and build community.

"We are working on ways to treat each other with dignity and respect," said Sisters High School Principal Joe Hosang. "We wanted to build a community here at the high school within each class. We've hosted Challenge Days before, and there is an emphatic buzz that happens for weeks after."

According to the nonprofit's website, the six-and-a-half-hour program works to create trust and connection by helping students step out of their comfort zone. Throughout the day participants begin to recognize stereotypes and labels that exist among them and discuss the healthy expression of emotions.

"For me the step over the line (activity) was the most impactful part of the day," said sophomore Cassidy Ling-Scott. "The leader of Challenge Day would say something, and if it was true for you you step across the line and turn and face

everyone who hadn't crossed over. As an example, if the leader said 'step across the line if you are under 18 years old' then the sophomores would step across and face the adults. During this activity the questions dove into the hardships some people may have experienced already in life, including death in the family, someone close having an addiction, or parents divorcing.

"Stepping across the line and seeing that you were not the only one who had experienced whatever the leader had said was really impactful for me," Ling-Scott continued. "If I didn't step over the line for a certain hardship then seeing people who did really made me feel for them and helped me to understand new things about the people in my class."

Challenge Day is one of the most requested from all of our students.
— Principal Joe Hosang

Challenge Day teaches students to "Be the Change" in their school or community. It incorporates their formula for change — encouraging students to notice, choose, and act. Students who participated in the program left the room inspired to seek ways to contribute to the creation of a positive school environment.

This year's Challenge Day at Sisters High School was supported in part by The Roundhouse Foundation and other funds from the Oregon Community Foundation.

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Of a certain age...

By Diane Goble
Columnist

In some cultures, those who reach a certain age quietly walk away from their villages and go off to die so they won't be a burden to their family. I'd like to think we've risen above that in this day and age, but here I find myself approaching that certain age living in Sisters, where it seems, though unspoken, that's pretty much what's expected.

We have developers here who only think on the large scale and argue over pittances instead of asking people what they want and making it happen. When I talk to my senior friends and neighbors, they lament over feeling they will be forced to leave family and friends, and regular activities to seek housing elsewhere, alone among strangers.

When we talk about our housing needs, it's for one-story, smaller units at affordable rents for seniors on fixed incomes. We talk about tiny houses, studio or one-bedroom apartments, not three-story facilities with amenities for a hundred residents. But what we need is not profitable for the developers.

Those of us in our 70s, 80s and 90s do just fine living independently at Tamarack Village but these are two- and three-bedroom apartment homes and they keep raising the rents until they've become unaffordable for single seniors. But there is no where else to go in Sisters. These are better suited to growing young families who hope to find jobs and populate our schools and become homeowners.

The waiting list is a year long because we have no other housing options.

People are aging better than they did years ago. We eat healthier, we exercise, we're active, some of us still have jobs, a lot of us do volunteer work. We visit our doctor regularly and catch things early so we're not sickly. We don't so much need assisted living as to help each other and if we have elder communities of small units, we're more likely to carpool, share community meals, share coupons and buy in bulk, spend less time alone, stay involved in the community, mentor young people, be useful.

When I moved into Tamarack Village, I was told they couldn't raise the rent on my unit ... a good thing because my rent was already 50 percent of my income. I'm one of those "rent-burdened" people you may have read about. It's my own fault. I choose helping others over accumulating wealth and possessions. Not that I expect a reward, but to become homeless at this point seems cruel and excessive punishment in return for pursuing a spiritual path over material goals.

I told the affordable-housing people last month that

I was 30 days from being homeless if they raised my rent. So guess what? They raised my rent! It didn't go up much, but at the same time my auto insurance went up, my health insurance premium went up, my internet service went up and my Social Security didn't. If I didn't work odd jobs to earn extra money, I'd be gone already. I'll be 75 in a few months, how much longer will I be able to keep that up?

Now, I realize that this is happening all over Oregon between gentrification and the retiring rich folks from the south moving up here to take advantage of the lower cost of living, abundance of water, and wide open spaces, but they seem to have no regard for history or community or the natives. It's like Columbus discovering a new land to exploit and wiping out the natives and their culture all over again.

It's really a loss to Sisters that people who have contributed to the town's vitality and appeal as workers, as volunteers, as mentors, as caregivers, have to move on by a certain age. Have we outlived our usefulness just because we can't keep up with the cost of living in Sisters?

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