



Greeley West Students Embrace Diversity

March 13, 2009 – Two Greeley West High School students who are heading to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. next week are calling it a once-in-a-lifetime experience that they hope will help them invigorate the ongoing efforts at Greeley West to embrace and respect diversity.

Alan Brozovich and Ruben Gonzalez, both juniors at West, are among 20 delegates from Colorado chosen for the Robert B. Sturm Youth Leadership Mission to the Holocaust Museum March 15-18. The educational trip is sponsored by the Mountain States and Plains States Regional Offices of the Anti-Defamation League and paid in full by Sturm, a Denver philanthropist. They are the only two delegates from the same school. And they both have clear reasons why they were selected.

Both are involved in clubs at West that promote equality, peace and respect while combating prejudice. Ruben is leading efforts with Students Taking A New Direction in Diversity (STANDD), and Alan has helped reconstitute the gay-straight alliance club Common Ground. Both have faced prejudice in their own lives.

Alan spoke of an instance that made him want to take action. He was in a park in an affluent area of Greeley a few years ago and saw a Caucasian father and young son playing catch with a football when a boy of a different race walked up and ask to join in. The father “looked at him like he was the scum of the earth,” Alan said. “All of the sudden was he like ‘son, let’s go in.’ ... It was just one of the saddest things to see.”

The shock remains fresh in Alan’s mind. “We’re in the 21st century,” he said. “We can harvest nuclear energy; we can do all these amazing things, yet we still can’t get past the differences. We can’t look past those things and realize we’re all human.”

Ruben said he’s heard what it was like for his father growing up in Island Grove, facing prejudices and dangers in the 1980s. His father has learned to deal with people, though, and passed the advice to Ruben, telling him, “You don’t control where you were born, you don’t control where you come from; you’re just born and as a person you make the best of that. So don’t judge anyone how they look. Not everyone’s given the perfect opportunity. Not everyone’s born into a family with loving parents or loving siblings. Not everyone’s born into a household *with* parents. You can’t judge anyone on where they come from.”



Greeley West junior Ruben Gonzalez, left, and senior James Lozano hold a “Resolution of Respect” poster like many that are being prepared all over the school. Gonzalez and Alan Brozovich have been chosen as delegates to visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., March 15-18.



NewsFeature

Greeley-Evans | Weld County School District 6

While in Washington, the Colorado delegation will meet up with another 20 delegates from Omaha, Neb., and visit the Holocaust Museum, meet Holocaust survivor Bea Karp, engage in activities and discussions about applying the lessons of the Holocaust to modern-day problems. “We’re going to learn about all the cultures involved and how it happened, why it happened,” Ruben said. “We’re going to see why everyone was thinking what they were thinking and how this could happen.” Alan said he wants to examine “why aren’t we focusing on other holocausts that are going on now. I hope this fuels a desire to bring change.”

All delegates, as part of their experience with the Washington mission, have committed to a year-long group project in which they share with the community what they will have learned. Each student will have an individual project, then share with the statewide group – which already has met three times in Denver – and incorporate others’ experiences in order to create even more effective projects.

The Washington, D.C. mission is far from the only activity on their calendars. Although it will happen while they’re gone, Alan and Ruben are helping prepare for a school-wide diversity effort initiated by principal Bryan Wright. On Wednesday, March 18, every student in the school will receive a pamphlet titled “A Vision of Multicultural Unity,” and then discuss diversity during one of their class periods. The pamphlet, which was assembled at West and printed for free by Greeley Printers, describes how and why discriminatory jokes, slurs, written words, physical harassment, and sexual harassment are unwelcome at the school. It also details guidelines for response, consequences of these actions, and the school’s goals of multicultural education. “Our ultimate goal is to have a school where students and staff live and learn together in a school climate of mutual respect for each other...and with awareness of the promise such a climate of mutual trust and understanding has for the greater society in which we all live,” the pamphlet states.

With help from the school’s administration and staff, and by tapping outside resources, students are taking the lead in making the school a more welcoming, understanding place to be. The Anti-Defamation League helps a great deal with STANDD and Common Ground efforts by providing a network of advisers and all manner of materials, from pens to buttons to printed handouts and signs. “It helps you get the point across,” Alan said. “The support ADL provides is like a parent that stands behind and keeps you strong: It all starts with a dream, and ADL makes that possible.”

“And if we didn’t have dedicated students, none of this would happen,” Ruben said in a computer lab while more than 20 diverse but like-minded Spartans spent part of their morning planning events in their “No Place for Hate” campaign, in which each classroom will get a poster and individual pledge sheets for students to sign a “Resolution of Respect.” The resolution is a pledge to combat prejudice, understand one’s own biases, seek to understand differences between people, support victims of hate, respect individuals’ dignity and commit to make a positive impact in the community. The project will culminate with a large “No Place for Hate” banner being hung at the entrance of the school.

Ruben said the “No Place for Hate” campaign is in its infancy. “We just started. The club really won’t be up and officially running until next year,” he said. “We want more students, we want to fill this room up, at least, by next year.”

The young volunteers do not intend to limit their efforts to West alone. They already have plans to make presentations to students at Meeker Elementary and want to speak to middle schoolers as well.

“Now it’s like everyone’s united in making a stand,” Alan said. “And that’ll make everything change.”