

YMCA recognizes Sunnyvale Challenge Team

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Once a month in an upstairs room at Sunnyvale's Department of Public Safety headquarters, people invested in the community take time out of their day to help steer kids and families away from the negative influences of drugs and gangs.

DPS Capt. Doug Moretto spearheaded the effort after gang violence shook a community that had never seen it before. For the past five years, the team has built partnerships with more than 40 organizations and nonprofit groups in the area, and their hard work is being recognized.

The YMCA of Silicon Valley and Project Cornerstone are giving the Challenge Team the Community Values Youth Award for 2013. The regional award is recognized nationally by the YMCA.

"We're flattered and excited about the recognition that we're getting both locally and regionally and potentially nationally with this award, but at the same time the team was never formed or interested in receiving recognition," Moretto said. "We are all about bringing community members together to achieve our over-arching goals and seeing where it goes from there."

Since its inception, the team has connected troubled teens with activities within the community from soccer to cooking. By using three key tactics--mentoring, developing parenting skills and resource connection--the team aims to build a strong network for Sunnyvale youth.

"The Sunnyvale Challenge Team was chosen because of the dedication shown to support all youth in Sunnyvale. By

bringing together a coalition of government, schools, nonprofits, athletic programs, and faith communities, the challenge team shows a dedication and understanding of the need for these community elements to work together to build a community where youth are valued," said Elizabeth Franco, Project Cornerstone director of development and communications.

"Additionally, organizations in other cities have reached out to the Sunnyvale Challenge Team to learn from their efforts and replicate them elsewhere. Their efforts of the Sunnyvale Challenge Team will be felt beyond the Sunnyvale city limits."

Known as The Roundtable, the team works directly with the Moose Lodge, the school district, Sunnyvale PAL, Columbia Neighborhood Center, the city's library and community services department and many others.

"Looking back to when we first started, we truly were a grassroots organization," Moretto said. "One of the catalysts to bringing this team together was some acts of pure gang violence in some of our neighborhoods that we had never seen before. We knew we had to do something about it, and how we started was looking at what's the root cause of that."

Modeled after the Mountain View Police Department's Challenge Team, which has been around for 25 years, Sunnyvale's team hopes to continue to build community for years to come.

"We've transformed from a grassroots think tank to really a program-driven, politically powerful group that can look at all of the resources available in the community and get them connected with where they need to be," Moretto said.

The 2013 Asset Champions Awards Breakfast will take place March 28 at the Santa Clara Convention Center. This year's event will feature former San Francisco 49ers quarterback and Super Bowl MVP Steve Young as the keynote speaker.

Registration is open and tickets can be purchased at 2013assetchampionsbreak fast.eventbrite.com.

For more information about the challenge team, visit sunnyvale.ca.gov/Departments/PublicSafety/GetInvolved/ChallengeTeam.aspx.

