

HEROES – MAKING A DIFFERENCE

STORY BY Eileen Wilson

Hero worship is a popular pastime. We all love to hear the stories, catch glimpses of great and powerful people doing amazing, daring and miraculous things.

Thousands of heroic acts take place every day right here in our own neighborhood. With the New Year comes three inspirational stories of local heroes and how they have made a difference in our community.

NICK CUNNINGHAM

Nick Cunningham is a young man who makes a difference in children's lives every day.

Cunningham attended schools in the Eureka and Roseville High School districts, and when he left Granite Bay for UC Santa Cruz, he never imagined he would return to start a charitable organization that would assist foster youth.

Generation Fate is a public benefit corporation, which Cunningham founded two years ago. The organization's goal is to link foster youth – kids who have been removed from their homes, with services that can enrich their lives.

Cunningham runs the all-volunteer organization, with the assistance of more than 50 volunteers – dedicated men and women who coordinate events, write grant requests and raise funds.



TIM LLOYD/GRANITE BAY VIEW

Nick Cunningham is the founder of Generation Fate, an organization devoted to helping foster youth.

Lanky and laid back, sprawled on a couch in his cramped office, it's easier to picture Cunningham backpacking than speaking in the boardroom.

It's also easy to imagine him hiking in a woodsy spot in Napa Valley, an outing he recently participated in with Generation Fate's leadership program.

The program, developed for foster kids, involves a charity component, which entails kids researching and selecting a focus for good works, then finding ways to help to make a big problem smaller in some way. The program also includes enrichment activities for the youngsters.

When children are removed from their homes, they often

leave with very few possessions, Cunningham explained.

"There are all these new people in their lives – a judge, a court advocate, foster parents – but the kids still need to be kids, to have friends and to have fun. Kids need to be more than just foster youths, they need to play guitars, go on hikes, explore what they're good at," he said.

And that's where the fundraising comes in. It takes dollars to provide kids with guitar lessons, art lessons and dozens of other enrichment activities.

In addition to taking kids who are in the leadership program to enrichment activities, Cunningham started the Simple Heroes program.

"There are a lot of needs

these foster youths have that don't get met," he explained.

The Simple Heroes program is there to help kids obtain important school-related items such as computers, supplies and even junior prom or senior ball attire – whatever it takes to help kids feel like what they should be, just normal kids.

It's obvious Cunningham is excited about the work he does, as he eagerly points out photos of smiling kids and teenagers hamming for the camera on their most recent hike.

"I started to feel like I could really do something – to develop

a passion for it. Before I knew it, I had a charitable foundation," he said.

Generation Fate has connected with more than 250 kids in two years, and hopes to hook up with hundreds more in the near future. Cunningham is tightfisted with donation dollars, evident by his inexpensive office space and the fact that he hasn't drawn a salary since 2007. It's important that every dollar goes directly to the kids.

To learn more about Generation Fate or to contact Nick Cunningham, visit www.generationfate.org.

Nick Cunningham

What is a hero?

"A person or people who generally live life being kind to others."

Who are your heroes?

"My mom and dad, and people in general, are my heroes. I always think what people are doing is amazing, and they inspire me."

What aspects of a hero do you aspire to?

"Having the courage to live the life that I feel like I'm supposed to live."

Why do you volunteer?

"I don't like the term 'volunteering.' To me, it's not volunteer work, it's an opportunity that comes along for people to do what they're passionate about. Sometimes it just happens to be something that doesn't come with a paycheck."

Do you think you're a hero?

"I don't feel like a hero. This has been a really humbling experience for me. The heroes are the kids and the volunteers. Without the support of family and friends, I could never have been able to do it."

Sandy Harris

What is a hero?

"Someone who does the right thing without thinking about it."

Who are your heroes?

"People who can be counted on. My parents were always there for us and instilled the importance of family in us."

What aspects of a hero do you aspire to?

"To have the respect of others. To be reliable. To be a person others can trust and count on."

Do you think you are a hero?

"Not really, but my family thinks I am and that means a lot to me."

Why do you volunteer?

"I think volunteering is second nature to most people. I do it because I have been able to over the years."

SANDY HARRIS

Sandy Harris is another Granite Bay resident who shies away from the term "hero."

Harris has lived in Granite Bay since 1977 - a time when the area was simply referred to as Roseville or Folsom Lake.

In the 1980s Placer County's Board of Supervisors approved giving the unincorporated area a name - Granite Bay, and Harris, and other residents got together to make plans for the community they loved.

"There were only about 6,000 people here," Harris said. "We ran around and left flyers on door steps notifying

people there were meetings going on."

The group of grass-roots citizens developed a plan and presented it to the board of supervisors. Boardmembers liked the plan and adopted it, and the rest is history.

"So far we've been very successful in maintaining our original plan created in 1989," Harris said. "What you see here is pretty much what was on our original plan."

Harris is proud of the community plan and the fact there has been only one amendment to it since its inception, though she is quick to point out there were many people involved in its creation, and that today people appreciate the plan's well-thought-out details.

"Newcomers love our com-

munity plan. They want the open spaces, the wetlands," she said. "We have high density, low density and everything in between – it provides a variety of living styles."

Harris has been involved in various aspects of the community since the '70s. She was a secretary in special education for the Eureka Union School District, and is currently the secretary of the Granite Bay Community Association. She is also editor of the association's newsletter, the Alert.

In addition, she has served two terms on the grand jury, and was a volunteer for the Sheriff's Service Center for 16 years.

Harris enjoys attending

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