

Student group SAVEs room for awards

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COVENTRY — A student group that began with a spark at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry in 2005 has spread across the country like wildfire as other schools have adopted similar programs.

The group is known as SAVE or Students Against Vandalism Everywhere. Student Taylor Therrien and six of her peers founded the group, which has grown to more than 125 members and implemented countless programs at the school and in the community.

Last month, SAVE was recognized for its recent accomplishments by the Youth Crime Watch of America.

At the 19th annual Youth Crime Watch of America Conference in Miami, Fla., SAVE members learned they were going to be presented with three awards — the YCWA Middle School Site of the Year, the YCWA Web site of the Year and the YCWA Advisor of the Year.

Sixteen students from the group and nine chaperones attended the conference to receive these awards. The group used a portion of its Rhode Island Department of Education and Learning Service America grant funding and paid out-of-pocket for the trip.

At the conference, the students and their advisers said, they detailed some of their accomplishments. They talked about their history at the school, when they were formed and how they have grown. They talked about fund-raising efforts and how, since the group's inception, it has generated over \$100,000 in funds and donations to support its service efforts.

Among the efforts highlighted by the attendees was 2007's clean up of Sweet Wightman Historic Cemetery; and the creation of anti-vandal-



Submitted Photo

Sixteen Coventry students, all members of Students Against Vandalism Everywhere, and their chaperones took an airboat tour of the Florida Everglades during some free time as they attended the 19th Annual Youth Crime Prevention Conference and International Forum in Miami, FL last week.

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Kyle Carpenter
SAVE member

ism signs, bookmarks and bumper stickers, all of which were distributed to six other local schools for use in their facilities; and the planting of more than \$6,000 worth of donated landscaping.

The attendees said they also spoke with the other students and advisers at the conference about how they'd recently met with

Rhode Island Attorney General Patrick Lynch to discuss vandalism and how they have developed a Web site to promote SAVE's activities and inform others about the negative impacts of vandalism and other crimes.

The group's Web site, www.stop-vandalism.net, which was created by two founding members of the group, Joseph Rocchio and Nicholas Paiva, won acclaim at the conference.

According to Charles Blanchette, SAVE adviser, the site averages more than 2,000 hits per month from visitors from around the globe. Visitors to the site can obtain information about what the SAVE group does to address the problem of vandalism. The site also educates visi-

tors about the effects and costs associated with acts of vandalism and offers a forum for visitors to anonymously report acts of vandalism.

Blanchette said the site's interactive hotline has generated a number of reports, which enables the group to quickly inform the authorities.

Blanchette received an individual award at the conference this year as well. He was given the School Advisor of the Year award. Currently, Blanchette is one of six advisers for the SAVE group at the middle school, but he was the one adviser who helped the founding student members to get the program up and running at the school three years ago.

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WEST BAY LIFE

The littlest village has a big place in history

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WEATHER

The beautiful weather continues — for now
High: 72-77
Low: 48-53

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SAVE group earns awards

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In the awards ceremony literature, Blanchette is described as motivator, leader and devoted adviser.

"His strong demeanor, authentic leadership style, ability to listen closely to young people, undeterred enthusiasm for participatory democracy and willingness to move forward to support student initiatives in making a difference sets him apart from the other teachers and characterizes him as a great YCW advisor," the award literature reads.

The kids said the convention was interesting, exciting, and lots of fun.

It did require a fairly regimented schedule, with lectures, award presentations and other organized activities, but it gave them the chance to enjoy some free time in Miami, including an airboat tour of

the Everglades and a day trip to South Beach.

Participants also said they were surprised by the number of awards they were presented at the conference. Keshia Lawrence, a seventh-grade SAVE member who attended the conference, said she knew her group was active, but she didn't think it would be enough to win as many awards as they did.

"I guess I just looked at the fact that, because we are the smallest state and that there are other groups out there, I figured that they would be bigger and doing more, but I guess it just goes to show you that you can do a lot and get a lot accomplished even if you are small," said Kyle Carpenter, another SAVE member and conference attendee.

Blanchette said many of his students "do not realize that they are operating a comprehensive far-reaching pro-

gram."

"Many of these kids just think that they are a small group from a small country town and that what they are doing is not really making a difference, but this just goes to show you how far ahead of the game and how far-reaching we really are," Blanchette said. "I am so proud of these kids. They have all worked so hard and have managed to keep the program under control even though we have grown at the rate that we have.

"I have to admit, I never thought it would have gone like this, but the program has really just taken on a life of its own," he said. "We have six advisers and more than 100 student members who get the ideas on their own and run with them. They are the ones who make this program what it is and they are the ones who deserve the credit."