

[Back to regular view](#) • [Print this page](#)

A challenging night for parents at H-F

(http://www.southtownstar.com/neighborhoodstar/homewood-flossmoor/2031791_020710hfbeatcolumn.article)

February 7, 2010

By **John K. Ryan**

It's a parent's worst nightmare. The thought is so appalling that most cannot even contemplate it.

A shooting spree occurs at the local high school and your child is one of the victims.

That is exactly what happened to Darrell Scott, when his 17-year-old daughter, Rachel, was the first student killed during the Columbine High School massacre in 1999.

How does a parent go forward after suffering such a tragedy?

Parents in the Homewood-Flossmoor area discovered one way it is done when they listened to Scott give a presentation about his daughter and what happened that day.

What they learned about Rachel was that she was an especially aware and sensitive human being who sought out students who were picked on or uneasy at school, and made a point to help them feel better about themselves.

She told others and journaled about her beliefs in getting beyond prejudice, being yourself, reaching your potential and performing acts of kindness. She believed these small acts could spread to big changes.

To quote Rachel, she wanted to "create a chain reaction of kindness and compassion."

It was these noble goals that her family seized upon after her death to create the Rachel's Challenge program.

Rachel's family, including her father, go to school districts across the country to tell her story, detail what went down that day at the Littleton, Colo., high school and, most importantly, urge students to become part of Rachel's Challenge. Essentially that means committing to do random acts of kindness.

In the last few years, students in Homewood-Flossmoor Community School District 233, Homewood School District 153 and Flossmoor School District 161 who have witnessed the presentation have taken it upon themselves to follow through by making pledges and participating in school events geared around the spirit of the program.

Recently, it was the parents' turn to learn of Rachel's Challenge and see what the buzz is about.

Speaking with several parents and grandparents as they left the auditorium at H-F, I discovered many who put themselves in Scott's place, amazed at his ability to withstand reliving that day.

"I don't know how he does this. It must be the thought of carrying on her legacy," said Steve Marks, of Homewood, whose two sons graduated H-F a few years ago and are now in college.

"There are incidents like that at colleges, too. Every time the phone rings at a weird hour, I jump."

Zoe Ewan, whose grandchild attends H-F, said tears welled in her eyes thinking about what Scott has had to go through because of the shootings.

"He's so proud of her and what the memory of her has accomplished. This work I'm sure helps him to survive," said Ewan, of East Hazel Crest.

"It's great that kids are made aware of this and told about the importance of being kind. Kids can be cruel to each other."

Ewan's daughter, Cindy Robertson, talked about being deeply moved during videos of news reports from that day showing parents running up to the school to find out about their children's welfare.

"I felt a lump in my throat. The not knowing would be horrible," said Robertson, of Homewood.

"It can happen anywhere. When I hear about such incidents on the news, I get a knot in my stomach thinking how it'd be if my kid was at the school."

Rachel's Challenge was nothing new for Becki Hackett, who lived in Homewood for years. She's been hearing about it for the last few years from her daughter, Beth Hackett, a social worker at James Hart School in Homewood.

Beth has helped organize events and activities centered on the program at her school.

"Beth has always talked about it and now I understand why she does what she does with it," Becki said.

"It really is a great way to offer students an opportunity to do the right thing."

Putting spell-check to shame

Yeah, yeah, I know, with things like spell-check who needs to know how to spell? You might as well also argue that adding and subtracting aren't needed because of calculators, and knowing facts is no longer important because of the Internet.

Those are only tools to enhance vital functions of the brain. The basic concepts still need to be learned.

Many students who are human spell-checks participated Wednesday in the South Suburban Cook County Spelling Bee at James Hart School in Homewood.

Among the winners were:

First place - Esmeralda Manzo, sixth-grade, Columbia Central Middle School, Steger (second consecutive year as winner in this contest). This year, she won on the word "obstinate."

Second place - Amatullah Mir, third-grade, Aqsa School, Bridgeview.

Third place - Jasmine Bovia, fifth-grade, Matteson Elementary School, Matteson.

The three winners now move on to the Suburban Cook County Regional Spelling Bee at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 18 at Mannheim Middle School, Melrose Park.

Affiliates: [YourSeason.com](#) | [RogerEbert.com](#) | [SearchChicago - Autos](#) | [SearchChicago - Homes](#) | [Local Area Jobs](#) | [Public Record Search](#) | [Centerstage](#) | [North Shore Magazine](#)

Express Links: [TV Listings](#) | [Video](#) | [Yellow Pages](#) | [Submissions](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Eating In](#) | [Restaurant Reviews](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Media Kit](#)
© Copyright 2010 Sun-Times Media, LLC | [Terms of Use](#) • [Privacy Policy](#) • [Submission Guidelines](#) • [About Our Ads](#)