

The Morning Journal (morningjournal.com), Serving Northern Ohio

News

VIDEO: 'Rachel's Challenge':Columbine victim's legacy, kindness lives on

Friday, February 19, 2010

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OBERLIN — Rachel Scott always knew she would touch many lives. When she was the first person tragically killed on April 20, 1999, during the attack on Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., it was only the beginning of the enormous impact her life would have.

Lorain County Joint Vocational School students gathered yesterday for an assembly to hear Scott's story — not just the story of her death, but how her legacy could potentially change the life of everyone who heard her message.



Former Olympic weight lifter Shane Hamman delivered a powerful, moving presentation titled "Rachel's Challenge." Throughout the presentation, Hamman recited excerpts from Scott's diaries and gave examples of how her extraordinary kindness affected the lives of everyone she came into contact with and how the audience could emulate her compassion.

While the presentation is commonly delivered by members of Scott's family, Hamman said he became involved with the program after meeting her family. Hamman said he was living at the Olympic training center in Colorado Springs, Colo., when the Columbine attack occurred and watched it on the news.

After that, he became acquainted with the Scott family and eventually began speaking at events.

Hamman spoke about Scott's five challenges. He said that if everyone in the audience would work to eliminate prejudices, set their goals, choose positive influences and perform acts of kindness, they would "start a chain reaction" that would inspire their friends and family to do the same.

To illustrate the final challenge, starting a chain reaction, Hamman asked for the audience to close their eyes. "I want you to think about four or five people in your life, people who mean a lot to you," he somberly said. "Your last challenge for today is to go to those people and tell them how much they mean to you."

After the presentation, students were encouraged to sign a banner pledging their commitment to Rachel's Challenge. At the end of the school day yesterday, 1,023 students had signed.

"I think it was very inspiring and will help bring out the kindness in people," said Justin Colby, 17, a culinary arts student.

"It had a strong message to send to kids all over the world," added classmate Danny Wheeler, 16.

"Rachel's Challenge" was brought to JVS as part of a national Family Career and Community Leaders of America Initiative called "Stop the Violence." The JVS chapter of FCCLA is run by students in the early childhood education program and their instructor, Lisa Robson. "These kids have put their heart and soul into this," she said.

The group has hosted workshops and presentations at the JVS on several related topics, such as the dangers of cyber bullying. But the students have a general consensus that "Rachel's Challenge" had the biggest effect so far.

"We've seen students all over the hallway crying and hugging," said Amber Abfall, 18, a student in the early childhood education program and FCCLA.

Robson said "Rachel's Challenge" was specifically made possible through a grant through the offices of Lorain County Prosecutor Dennis Will. She added the body of the FCCLA chapter's work will be presented at the FCCLA Regional Rally competition on March 6.

URL: <http://www.morningjournal.com/articles/2010/02/19/news/mj2330372.prt>

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