

Rachel's Challenge visits Green High School

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By Jim Mesko
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Green, Ohio -

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, carried out the worst high school shooting in American history at Columbine High School in Colorado. The two seniors walked into the school and killed 12 students, one teacher and wounded 24 others before committing suicide. Their very first victim was junior Rachel Joy Scott, who was shot as she sat outside the cafeteria eating lunch with a friend. Rachel was an outgoing young girl who was known for her friendliness and compassionate good nature toward others.

Following her death, Rachel's family found six diaries. In her writings she talked about wanting to change the world.

"I have this theory that if one person can go out of their way to show compassion then it will start a chain reaction of the same," Rachel wrote in an essay shortly before her death.

Darrell Scott, Rachel's father, organized "Rachel's Challenge" to help young people learn to practice kindness and compassion as Rachel believed. The organization has grown and presents hundreds of programs across the United States annually.

"Rachel's Challenge" has established clubs to promote these values here and abroad.

On Dec. 3, students at Green High listened to former U.S. Olympic weight lifter Shane Hamman talk about Rachel and the organization founded in her honor. The presentation included videos of the shooting, interviews with victims, her family and friends. The students were divided into two groups for two presentations. Students had the opportunity to attend a training session if they wanted to participate in further activities in school.

Hamman stressed five challenges that the students should strive for to make changes. These were to eliminate prejudice, set goals, choose positive influences, perform little acts of kindness and start a chain reaction.

During the Green presentation, hardly a student moved and many had tears in their eyes.

The burly weight lifter was able to evoke some laughter despite the serious nature of the program from the audience. He mentioned Rachel's diaries.

"Guys don't keep diaries," he said, "They keep journals."

"It was very touching," said Kelsey Hodgkinson. "It made my eyes open up to accept everybody."

"I realized how close your friends should be to you," said Amanda McAleese. "It made me want to start a journal and try to change my life. It made me realize how short life really is."

"This inspired me," said Carrie Bly. "It made me think of people who are actually in my life."

"This was very moving and will change how people see each other," said Liz Gibson. "Hopefully it will make an impact on others."

"The presentation had a good message," said Ryan Robinson. "It made you think. There was a lot of coincidences between what Rachel wrote and what happened later."

"It was really inspiring," said Lucy Carson. "It made me want to go out and help someone. It had good points, like how everyone is equal, and how you should treat people like you would like to be treated."

"The presentation was beautiful," said Sydney Guyton. "It opened up my eyes to how critical it is to accept others. I fully support and believe her message."

During the training session students were also asked to make comments or reflect on Rachel's message.

"The biggest thing about prejudice is that we make up our minds about who people are," said Erin Berlin. "There is too much hate in the world."

"I was really impacted when I heard her brother eventually forgave the two boys that killed his sister," said Brianna Evelsizer.

In the evening Hamman gave a similar presentation to more than 100 parents and students. Karen Campbell said she was really impressed when her sons came home and talked about the assembly.

Green Board of Education President Bob Campbell was impressed that Green already has a Chain Reaction organization similar to what was promoted.

"It was really cool about Green's Chain Reaction existing and doing the same thing," said Campbell. "It is making a difference and a good place for it to grow."

"I was glad that the Green Schools Foundation was able to bring something positive to the kids and community," said Nancy Pruneski.

"The thing I really liked was that the teachers said how fabulous it was," said Jessica Kraus, a teacher who helped organize the event. "The students gave them a lot of positive feedback."

To learn more about Rachel's Challenge go to www.rachelschallenge.org.

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