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Teaching Adolescents to Argue? By Lee Borrowman, with Mojgan Vijeh

rgue? Any parent of a 13-Ayear old will tell you, "They already know how to do that!" But there's more to the art of debate. According to the national Middle School Public Debate Program, debate helps students develop speaking, thinking, and even listening skills. Students who debate become more engaged in the world around them and develop sophisticated knowledge about a wide range of current events and complex ideas. The East Bay Debate League, founded in 2006 by a group of local middle school teachers, kicked off its second season at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School on No-

Students from Joaquin Moraga, Orinda Intermediate and Stanley Middle School went head to head against each other and students from as far away as San Jose and Sacramento, arguing one side or the other of such topics as: Medical testing on animals does more harm than good; The U.S. should have a draft for military service; On balance, video games do more harm than good; and California should raise the driving age to 18.

Each speaker was given twenty minutes to prepare and five minutes to present the pro or con side of the subject. JM teacher Don Read, who helped establish the East Bay Debate League, says, "One of the things that I love about the Debate



League is how excited the kids get when they find out the topic they will be debating and whether they will be speaking for the proposition or the opposition. They all become so very busy writing down notes and planning their strategies. I admire them for the courage it takes for students to speak in

front of people and defend their

position on very challenging

At the end of the day, OIS went home with first place for total school wins, JM took the overall win (based on number of participants), and a debater from North Creek Academy, a private school in Walnut Creek, won first place for an individual speaker. Most of the students found the event extremely challenging, but said they will do it again.

Some of the JM parents whose children are on the debate team expressed a concern that Campolindo High School does not offer a Public Speak-

The JM debate team and coaches hosted the first event

ing/Debate option, and they would like to see one created so that the middle school students who are getting this early exposure to debate can continue to pursue their interest while in high school. But Campo Principal Carol Kitchens explains, "Our students participate in the extra curricular programs of Model UN, Academic Decathlon and Mock Trial, which afford them the opportunity for public speaking and debate."

For more information about the Middle School Public Debate Program go to http://www.middleschooldebate.com/leagues/ebdl.htm

Upcoming middle school

debate tournaments: December 8, 2007 at Orinda Intermediate School, Orinda February 9, 2008 at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School,

Date TBA spring 2008 at Stanley Middle School, Lafayette

Moraga

Principal Exchange By Cathy Tyson

There's a reason monte High School Associate Principal Sharon Bartlett's Spanish is getting better every day. Both she and Principal Silvio Rasmusen of Leonardo da Vinci High School in Rio Cuarto are participants in the Fulbright Fellowship Exchange Program. Rasmusen is here for three weeks shadowing her and doesn't speak much English.

Rasmusen's school in Argentina is on holiday at the moment. Bartlett plans to reverse roles, visiting in July when Miramonte is on summer break.

Since 1946, The Fulbright Program has facilitated exchanges with teachers, administrators, graduate students, and professionals to increase mutual understanding. Sponsored and administered by the U.S. Department of State and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, this is a unique opportunity for both Bartlett and Rasmusen to learn about each other's culture, schools, and teenage behavior.

Rasmusen is the principal of a private school with 180 students from seventh to twelfth grade in the center of Rio Cuarto, population 150,000, in the Cordoba province, located in the center of Argentina. This is not his first trip to the U.S. He taught at a school in Miami for a month, and has been to Cuba as part of a conference.

The biggest difference between Miramonte and his school is the students stay in the same classroom, while the teachers rotate through six pe-



Principal Silvio Rasmusen of Leonardo da Vinci High School

Photo Andy Scheck

riods each day. There the school day runs from 7:45 in the morning until 1:45 in the afternoon, when the students go home to have lunch and siesta. Usually only the students that have afternoon P.E. or after school sports stay and have lunch at school.

Rasmusen was overwhelmed at a recent Matador football game with the number of students, players, cheerleaders and little cheerleaders in training that happened to be there that night. Halloween was another big surprise; neither it nor Day of the Dead is celebrated in Argentina. He took a number of photos of costumed students and staff.

Overall he was impressed by how orderly and

well behaved the students are at Miramonte. Especially at lunch or brunch, when the bell rang, within five minutes all 1,400 students were back in class. In visits to Spanish classes he noted there were lots of questions by the students about Eva Peron and husband President Juan Peron.

While at Glorietta Elementary School, Rasmusen remarked just how different parent involvement is here. In Argentina, families are tightly knit, especially since teens can't get a driver's license until 18, but parents do not help out at school. He saw firsthand the number of parent volunteers in the classroom and serving hot lunch.

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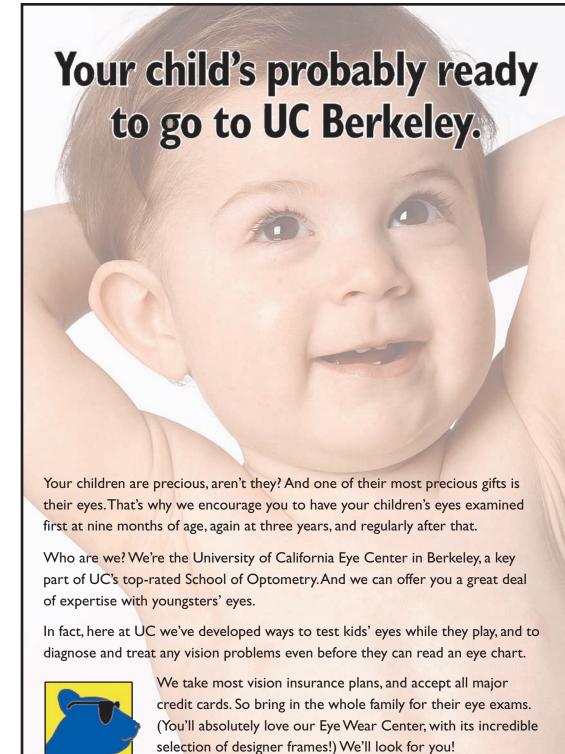
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