

Joe 15 teams dedicated to community service

By JAN DAVIS
Observer staff

Debbie Page-Maples, founder of the nonprofit organizations, Joe 15 Team and the Joe 15 Clubs, spoke at four schools in the community during October, which is Crime Prevention Month. Her goal was to educate club members at Stonewall Middle School, Stonewall Jackson High School, Manassas Christian School and Brentsville District High School about being aware of their surroundings to promote their safety.

She is passionate about the topic because of a very personal experience. She started Joe 15 Team and the Joe 15 Clubs in memory of her son, Joe, who was an innocent victim of a senseless shooting in February 2008. At a party held at a friend's home, several party crashers were asked to leave after a fight over a dance contest. The crashers left and then returned later, firing random shots at the guests. Joe, who didn't even know about the fight and crashers, was standing in the backyard when one of the bullets hit him. After four days he died from his gunshot wound.

Page-Maples was struck by the tremendous amount of love and support she saw from the young people who lined the halls at the hospital the four days Joe was there. She explained, "This compassion and love gave me the idea of starting the Joe 15 Team in honor of Joe."

The team and four school clubs now are out in the community involved in community service helping many organizations and individuals including blood drives, collecting coats and blankets for families who need them, school supply drives and even a pet supply drive.

Students in the Joe 15 Clubs visit senior centers close to their schools and play cards and balloon volleyball, conduct dances and craft projects, and make connections with the residents by talking and spending time with them. The youths' goal is to make a positive difference in their community.

On Oct. 15, during their club meeting at Stonewall Middle School, Page-Maples told the students, "I am here today not as a club member, but as a mother. My son, Joe, was a quiet, shy person who didn't like to talk a lot. Until 20 months ago that described me too, but now I know I can't be quiet. Joe, who was 20 and attending [Northern Virginia Community College], was a student just like you and went to Stonewall Middle School when he was in middle school and graduated from Stonewall Jackson High School."

The students could relate to



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Todd Fisher, Prince William County Police officer and Stonewall Middle School resource officer, spoke to students at Stonewall Middle School during October Crime Prevention Month about being safe and being aware of their surroundings. Debbie Page-Maples, founder of the Joe 15 Team Clubs, is standing behind him.

Joe as his mother explained how he loved sports, was even on the Stonewall Middle School Championship Basketball Team wearing number 15. She said 15 was his favorite number and shared, "It is ironic I am speaking to you on the 15th."

She quietly explained the events of the evening when Joe was shot and displayed a poignant poster of photos of Joe's life. "We think drive-bys and shooting just happen in D.C. We think it doesn't happen here, but it did right down the road," said Page-Maples.

"Joe didn't even know about the fight. Maybe if he did, things would have been different. I want you to be safe. Know your surroundings and know who you are with. Be a leader, not a follower. Be involved in your community."

"You can make a difference in someone's life and yours," she

shared.

Prince William County Police Officer Todd Fisher, the school's resource officer, then addressed the students discussing what to do in situations such as seeing a friend with a firearm or knowing of some illegal activity. He told them, "You can call 911 if it is an immediate emergency or the police non-emergency number at 703-792-6500. It would be a good idea to have the numbers in your cell phone. You don't have to leave your name," Fisher said.

During the question-and-answer time, he asked them what they should do if they see a friend with a firearm and then suggested, "Leave immediately and tell someone, and if you are in a situation when someone is shooting, seek cover behind something that will stop a bullet."

The students listened intently and were moved by Page-Maples' courage as she relayed how important it was for them to be safe and to be aware of their surroundings.

Sixth-grader Gregory Sullivan shared, "I learned it is important to know who the people you are around with and if you see danger, get out."

Jacob Willis a classmate, said, "I learned if you are ever in a situation where there are firearms or drugs, tell an adult and get away quickly. It made me feel so bad that Joe, who was just a bystander, was hurt."

Page-Maples explained, "If it just helps one student it will be worth it."

More information about the Joe 15 Team and the Joe 15 Clubs are online: www.theJoe15team.org.