

2 Northern Valley Coalition: 'Working together as one'

BY PATRICK KEARNS
OF NORTHERN VALLEY PRESS

NORTHERN VALLEY

The Northern Valley Coalition held a special presentation and updated the organization's progress at Northern Valley Demarest on Nov. 19. Approximately 60 parents, elected officials and school personnel joined together in the auditorium to discuss a safe, drug-free Northern Valley for students and their families.

"This all started last year with wanting to do something positive in the community," Melissa Driscoll, one of the group's organizers told the assembly.

Driscoll, along with Soci Kayserian and Shari Moss (the three co-presidents of the organization) have enlisted the help of numerous parents and volunteers to develop different committees interested in putting on events and programs.

"There's so much energy and support," Driscoll said, of the parents and volunteers involved.

The first initiative discussed at the meeting is S.A.F.E. Homes,

which asks parents to take a pledge promising not to serve underage individuals alcohol and supervise all large gatherings in their home. Parents that sign up will be placed on a list opening them to communication with other parents.

So far, from attending back to school nights in all seven Northern Valley communities, over 280 families have taken the pledge. The information was made available for any individual attending the meeting.

Some of their past and upcoming events were also highlighted, including the very successful Trunk or Treat, which brought 200 community children a safe place to trick or treat on Halloween. An estimated 65 high school students participated in the event, Kayserian said.

"It was such an awesome event," she told attendees. "The kids want to do it every year."

Looking forward, the organization wants to hold an ultimate Frisbee event and is playing on hosting a battle of the bands competition in March. The concert will be their keystone fundraising event.

The coalition recently



Photo by Patrick Kearns

The Northern Valley Coalition recently held a meeting to provide educational tools to parents to help combat any issues including drug use and depression.

received non-profit status in New Jersey and is waiting to hear word on the federal level. The group is also pursuing federal grants to help pay for programming.

The meeting was also held to provide information to parents concerning the creation of a safe, risk-free environment for

families.

Around the room were educational pamphlets and flyers discussing everything from drug use, to alcohol abuse, to depression and dealing with mental illness.

The Center for Alcohol and Drug Resources (TCADR), a Hackensack-based organization,

presented to parents a program called: What's Trending With Your Kids? Empowering Parents to Combat Risky Trends. The program educated parents on youth culture, which, as Driscoll noted, is much different from when the parents in attendance were adolescents.

TCADR encourages parents to maintain an active role in the lives of their child, knowing his or her friends and the parents of those friends. Other tips include: being a role model and setting a positive example, knowing when to reach out for help, keeping track of alcohol and prescription drugs in the home and staying educated themselves.

Other organizations were represented at the meeting too, including The COR Group, a full-service psychology group offering therapy on an array of issues.

The Northern Valley Coalition was one of the positive groups formed out of the lengthy discussions regarding random drug testing at Northern Valley Regional and the perceived lack of educational tools for parents and teens. It was modeled after the Hills-Valley Coalition.

"The initiation of the Northern Valley Coalition has been an outgrowth of Northern Valley-Old Tappan and Northern Valley-Demarest having communications with their respective parent, teacher and student organizations to continue to seek ways to provide relevant substance awareness education for our students, with the goal of eventually forming a larger coalition that would include middle schools and community organizations," explained Dr. Bruce Sabatini, principal of Northern Valley Regional High School at Old Tappan back in June.

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