

Promise Scholars thank their many volunteers

By Suzanne Sproul, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin



Jon Rogers, left, Sara Clark, Angela Dao join Jenny Padilla, Sarah Moellering and Greg Bradbard at the recent Promise Scholars appreciation event hosted by Safelite Autoglass of Ontario.

It was a circus for Promise Scholars recently, but that was by design.

The Ontario-Montclair School District-based education program hosted its first volunteer appreciation event with an “Under the Big Tent” theme to illustrate how large and encompassing it has become.

Promise Scholars is an early college access program that aims to help prepare students in the Ontario Montclair School District for success later in life. The program wants to increase college completion rates and college attendance by encouraging students to go on to institutions of higher learning. It also introduces them to different careers and career paths early in their education. Promise Scholars hosts different college awareness activities throughout the year including career fairs and financial aid workshops starting at grade five and continuing through high school and post-graduation.

Safelite Auto Glass, already well-known throughout the Inland Valley for its community service, opened its office space to accommodate more than 100 volunteers who attended. These volunteers have spent the past year mentoring and encouraging students about the importance of education. These volunteers helped lead college tours, assisted families with college financial aid applications and presented their personal college and career experiences to students. Students met one-on-one with college students during lunches and formed bonds. Many even exchanged letters while answering questions about schools.

The volunteers are as diverse as the Ontario-Montclair School District population, making for a great partnership. Volunteers include high school students, college students, college staff, and business and community employees from Ontario and Montclair, Soroptimist International of Montclair/Inland Valley members, Toyota North American Distribution Center employees and more.

“Overall, our volunteer database increased from about 40 last year, to more than 230 this year, who volunteered about 1,054 hours collectively. The expansion of our volunteer infrastructure is all due to the work of our AmeriCorps VIP, Sarah Moellering stationed at the OMSD and Angela Dao, stationed at Inland Empire United Way. They have worked long and hard and their enthusiasm has kept our volunteers coming back time and time again,” said Sara Clark, program coordinator.

These individuals have played a vital role in helping Promise Scholars serve 7,300 students this past school year, according to Clark.

“We chose the theme of ‘Under the Big Tent’ because it illustrates how many people have stepped up to help local students try to realize their dreams,” Clark said. “This program has impacted the lives of thousands of young people while raising an awareness of the importance of education. We also want them to realize they can graduate from high school and then go on to further their educations whether that is a community college, a four-year university or technical training. This program is helping these students achieve their dreams but making it a reality.”

To further the theme, **Ontario** and the **Ontario Convention Center** donated cotton candy, popcorn, hot dogs and drinks to the evening.

A very active partner in the process is the Inland Empire United Way.

Moellering is the AmeriCorps VIP/Promise Scholars volunteer coordinator. “The Promise Scholars volunteers have had a huge impact on our program. They have allowed us to reach more students and have graciously shared their college experiences with our students to encourage them to follow in their footsteps. Our program truly would not run the same without them,” she said.

Greg Bradbard said many of his Inland Empire United Way staff joined local business men and women in visiting classrooms. During the visits the volunteers spoke about their professions and what it took for them to achieve their goals.

“Hearing business people talk about their own educational paths and what it took for them to succeed is so important. What the students are hearing is that education makes for better lives,” said Bradbard, Inland Empire United Way president and chief executive officer. “We think Promise Scholars is a great program and we’re proud to be a part of it.”

Leslie Sorensen helped create the Promise Scholars program years ago. She said she was amazed at how far it has progressed. “There are so many volunteers willing to help and it’s making a difference, not only for the students but for the volunteers because it gives them an opportunity to really provide a service to their community,” she said.

SEEN AT THE SCENE – Dr. James Hammond, Ontario-Montclair School District superintendent; Leslie Sorensen, who helped create the program years ago and is the resource development administrator for Promise Scholars; Sam Crowe, Ontario-Montclair School District board of trustees member and long-time community supporter; Greg Bradbard, president and chief executive officer of Inland Empire United Way; and Chris Hollister, executive director of alternative instruction for the Chaffey Joint Union High School District.

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