



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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RED RIBBON WEEK RAMPING UP ACROSS FAYETTE COUNTY; LOCAL PARTNERS PROMOTING A DRUG FREE COMMUNITY

Uniontown, PA – Every year, Oct. 23-31 is designated as Red Ribbon Week. Local students might know it as the week when the Fayette County Drug and Alcohol Commission (FCDAC) hands out red ribbons and schools hold dress-up weeks, but the campaign and the history behind it is much bigger.

“Schools will come up with various ways that they’re going to celebrate Red Ribbon Week, and that’s great,” FCDAC Prevention Program Manager Erica Usher said. “We want to make sure the youth understand that Red Ribbon Week is not just a school thing.”

In fact, the Red Ribbon Campaign is the oldest and largest drug prevention program in the U.S., according to the FCDAC website. It was created in honor of Enrique “Kiki” Camarena, a special agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration who was kidnapped while on the trail of a multi-billion dollar drug pipeline in Mexico. After Camarena’s disappearance, friends and family members began wearing red ribbons in honor of the agent and his mission of stopping the spread of illegal drugs. Parents began adopting the symbol – and Camarena’s belief that one person can make a difference – when forming anti-drug coalitions.

Usher is quick to note that the Fayette County Drug and Alcohol Commission “did not invent Red Ribbon Week, but we’ve sort of colored how it looks here.”

Part of that has to do with the local businesses who have partnered with the commission. FCDAC provides red ribbons to all public school students in the county in grades K-12, as well as to students in some parochial schools. The “Free with Ribbon” program rewards students who wear those ribbons into participating local businesses during Red Ribbon Week.

“That really came from the partners, the businesses that have been willing to support this,” Usher said.

She explained that FCDAC approached businesses with the idea of rewarding students, but the businesses took it from there. “We said, ‘Here’s what we’re thinking. Is this something you would be willing to do?’”

In the past, the “Free with Ribbon” program has been aimed at elementary school students, but this year, it has expanded to include middle and high school students as well. Students who wear their red ribbons into a participating business during Red Ribbon Week will receive a reward of the business’s choosing.

“Since we’re giving a ribbon to everyone, we wanted to see if they would support any student who came in,” Usher said.

For example, Betty Mae’s Bakery in Masontown, a longtime supporter of the campaign, is offering a free goodie bag. Brooke’s Block Party in Connellsville is offering a ticket to free open play, and specific Subway locations are giving a free cookie.

A complete list of business specials is available on the FCDAC website at www.fcdac.org/redribbonweek.

Usher said representatives from the drug and alcohol commission are available to visit schools during Red Ribbon Week and “really, at any time.”

“We tell (students) what the campaign is all about, how it got started, and why it’s going on now,” she said. Students not only learn the history of the movement, but also “why it’s important to stay drug-free. Having a week where we talk about substance abuse prevention and we celebrate being drug-free is important.”

Usher said the drug and alcohol commission talks with students about what they can do and how they can “celebrate the choices people have made to be drug free.”

She went on to say one of the most significant things Red Ribbon Week does is provide an opportunity for parents and kids to talk about the dangers of drug use and why prevention is so important.

“Here’s a time for us across the country to say, ‘This is important,’” she said. “It gives that opportunity to talk about why we’re wearing this ribbon.”

To learn more about the Fayette County Drug and Alcohol Commission, visit www.fcdac.org. To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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