

# **The Capistrano Insider**

## **What's Really Going on in San Juan Capistrano**

May 11, 2010

### **Capistrano Anti-Gang Program Honored**

By OC Human Relations Commission



OC Human Relations recognized the most outstanding schools, community members and community-policing projects from across Orange County at the Human Relations Awards 39 Gala Celebration attended by over 450 people on Thursday, May 6 at the Grove of Anaheim. The City of San Juan Capistrano's GRIP program was recognized with a Community –Policing Award for their efforts at keeping young people in school and out of gangs. Awards 39 was presented by the ING Foundation.

“On its 39th anniversary, OC Human Relations takes great pride in honoring these extraordinary people,” says Nadia Bettendorf, chair of the OC Human Relations Commission. “These are Orange County’s unsung heroes, the people who dedicate tremendous amounts of their own time with no expectation of reward or recognition to make the county a better place for all people to live, work and do business. It’s a privilege to highlight their efforts.”

Criminal street gangs have been a problem in San Juan Capistrano for decades. In 2008, the City of San Juan Capistrano, the OC Sheriff’s Department, the OC District Attorney’s Office and principals of affected schools developed a program (GRIP) to intervene in the growth of these gangs. This collaborative effort grew to include City officials, prominent members of the community, PTA’s, and organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club of Capistrano Valley. GRIP focuses on dissuading younger children from joining gangs by using prevention and intervention strategies. Prevention is addressed by developing positive self-esteem and by using curriculum, developed by the GRIP partners, which highlights the negative consequences of gang membership.

Other prevention strategies include incentives such as socials, pizza lunches, attending an Angel's game, as well as offering activities to fill gaps during out-of-school hours. GRIP's approach to gang intervention includes conducting truancy and curfew sweeps, youth counseling, and providing parents with advice and assistance in keeping their children out of gangs. Truancy rates have dramatically decreased at the four target schools - over 80% in the last year! GRIP has also devised "Strike Teams" that first identify at-risk students and then meet with the youth and their parents to create an intervention plan. To date 50 interventions have been conducted and almost all youth involved have shown positive improvements. The community and schools have embraced the program wholeheartedly with literally hundreds of teachers and volunteers stepping up to mentor at-risk students on their own time. As well, local organizations and businesses have opened their wallets to financially support the volunteer appreciation and recruitment events.

The Santa Ana Police Athletic and Activity League was also presented with Community Policing Awards that recognizes departments that have tailored creative strategies to build positive relationships with the communities they serve.

Community Leaders awarded at the event were Arinder Singh Chadha, Jacqueline Johnson, Roxanna Jimenez and Kimberly McGlaughlin, Students ACT, Leonel Velazquez and Tom Thorkelson. OC Register columnist, Yvette Cabrera, received a "Courage In The Media Award."

Buena Park Jr. High School, Loara High School and Fullerton High School received a Distinguished Schools award, to recognize their exceptional contributions to promoting, nurturing, protecting and/or cultivating a campus that is safe, welcoming and equitable.

"We are pleased to partner with OC Human Relations as a sponsor of this event," said Rhonda Mims, president of the ING Foundation and senior vice president of the Office of Corporate Responsibility and Multicultural Affairs. "Congratulations to this year's award recipients. We commend them and OC Human Relations for their efforts to strengthen their communities, creating an inclusive environment in which everyone has the opportunity to thrive."