

Calling All Tri-City Young People: Your Vote Counts...Register and Vote!

SUBMITTED BY SHIRLEY GILBERT

Advait Prasad is a busy senior at Mission San Jose High School in Fremont. He's got a slew of tests, he's on the track team and he's waiting to hear what colleges have accepted him. He's also excited about the prospect of voting in the 2020 election since he turns 18 on April 23rd. That's why he registered when his economics class joined a presentation in the school's auditorium that centered around the history and importance of voting.

"Registering gets a bad rap," said Prasad. "It's part of the stigma with which we young people view the government. It doesn't matter what choices you make. You just need to make your voice heard. There's so much polarization in our country now and voting gives you some say in the future."

Prasad was one of 2,801 junior and senior high school students who registered to vote as part of an aggressive drive that covered seven schools over seven days in the Tri-City area. The schools were: Irvington, American, Washington, Mission, Robertson, Logan and Averroes, a private Muslim-based school.

Students from social science classes heard two presentations. The first, led by League of Women Voters, highlighted the history of voting including the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage and the 19th Amendment, reminded the students of the power of the youth vote and the breadth of voting issues. The second, led by teen leaders, took students through the voter registration process. Then, with the help of volunteers, they filled out the registration applications and sent them on to the registrar to be processed.

The organization at the heart of the drive is the Youth Voter Movement (YVM), a partnership with the League of Women Voters of Fremont-Newark-Union City. YVM, like the League, is nonpartisan and nonissue committed to registering all eligible youth so they have a stake in their own

future. In 2018, the youth vote enjoyed a 100-year high with an impressive 80 percent increase in voting nationwide. However, some 70 percent of those 65 or older vote, while only 38 percent of youth vote. This gap is what co-founder of YVM Julie Dunkle and her team are determined to close.

The push to register teenagers began when Dunkle and her son Michael created a program called the Parkland Voter Movement

way to get youth excited about voting and was encouraged to see student leaders taking charge of a great deal of the communication. "The line that keeps ringing in my head about youth voting is from the musical Hamilton. 'I am not throwing away my shot...I'm young, scrappy and hungry...and I'm not throwing away my shot.' I don't want these kids to throw away their shot."

Sarah Nauss, Social Science Department Chair at American



before the 2018 mid-term elections which resulted in the registration of some 3000 students. "The origins of that program," said Dunkle, "were inspired by the courageous youth of Parkland, to honor both their silenced and amplified voices. The new name better personifies how youth are leading a movement in voting and in democratic engagement."

Thanks to 100 students and 250 adult volunteers, YVM and the League were able to register the over 2000 students in record time. "It certainly takes a village," said Dunkle, shaking her head in wonder at what the team accomplished so quickly.

Gayle Tupper, a League member, was one of the new adult volunteers who helped pre-register and register students. She thinks the YVM is a great

High School, was the intermediary between teachers and the registration team for the drive at her school. American registered 829 students, the most of any of the seven schools. How to account for this high number? According to Nauss, there was a full commitment on the part of teachers and the school to cooperate with the registration process.

Nauss believes the Youth Voter Movement is a great initiative and fulfills an important purpose. "Congress is essentially broken," she said, "and controlled by old white men who don't look like our students. As a result, eligible students want to be involved now and change that in the future." Nauss remembers what it was like when she was her students' age. "The way our government worked was never explained to me in high school. That's why I

think YVM is such a fantastic program. The information young people get is first rate and they are more likely to register and vote when asked to do so in an organized way."

Alvin Lee is a student leader and activist at Mission San Jose High School and led the drive at his school. Lee is also the leader of a group called Generation Up that encourages activism and positive change to make education more dynamic. "I've always felt that youth voter registration is an important part of activism," he said, "and I want to register one million Millennials since the record hasn't been so good." Lee believes that young people can bring about positive change in our democracy. "Students really do care."

To further create awareness of the power of the youth vote and allow high school and college students to experience some hands-on activities, Irvington student Elaine Yan, along with support from YVM and the League staged a Get-Out-The-Vote Rally and march on March 1st at the Fremont Main Library.

It was exciting to encounter the industrious hubbub in the library's Fukaya Room where some 80 students and about 30 volunteers prepared for the march. There was a spirit of activism and determination to be part of the democratic process.

At one series of tables, students worked to stop voter suppression by telephoning and writing postcards, encouraging voters removed from the voter rolls in Elmore County, Alabama to reregister and vote. In many cases, these residents, often minorities or poor, have no idea they have been removed from the voter rolls. This Center for Common Ground program is called Reclaim Our Vote and is supported by many organizations such as the NAACP.

In another corner of the room and on the floor, youth designed posters for the march - "Democracy Dies in Darkness" and "Young Voters are America's Future" or "vote" written in a plethora of languages.

About ten elected officials attended the event including Senator Wiecekowski, County Assessor La, Mayor Mei, Council Members Keng and Lamnin, School Board Trustees Campbell, Cheema, Cox and Kaur. Students asked questions about the environment, gun control, student loans and tax assessments and possible internships. League members were available to register students and there were snacks aplenty and opportunities to acquire t-shirts, wristbands,

bookmarks and stickers. And through it all, a happy whirl of activity.

Then it was time for the boisterous crowd of teenagers to start the two-mile march to deposit their ballots in the Registrar of Voters Election mailbox and mail the voter suppression postcards. While the young people gathered with their posters at the Unity sculpture at Paseo Padre and Stevenson, students gave inspiring speeches about the power of voting.

In her speech, Drishti Gupta focused on issues important to Millennials such as debt forgiveness, climate change and health care. She stated that every vote counts and youth need to help get out the vote. Alvin Lee spoke about the "dilemma of how the older generation is screwing things up for us" and how fundamental shifts, led by the youth movement, is the answer. Jackie Cox talked about her great grandmother, Sarah Dudley Pettey, who was influential in the suffragist movement for black women in the early 1900's. She shared a few of her grandmother's quotes in relationship to women's abilities and energy. "What position is there that a woman cannot fulfill?" her great grandmother asked. Mrs. Pettey also challenged one's belief of the term colored. "All people," she said, "are colored from the fairest blond to the darkest hue of humanity."

On the route to the City Hall, drivers honked and cheered as the students held their posters aloft. At City Hall, young eligible voters cast their ballots. On the return journey to the Unity sculpture, student activists triumphantly mailed the voter suppression postcards.

Fremont Mayor Lily Mei called the rally inspirational and said she was "proud to witness and welcome our high school youth and young college adults joined together to celebrate and exercise their right to vote. Some for the very first time."

It was a fun and exhilarating time and also communicated a serious message: the youth vote is vital to the success of our democracy and to its future. Young people please register and vote!

If you would like to host similar events, register to vote, volunteer, send a donation or learn more about the Youth Voter Movement, go to www.youthvotermovement.org.

Flag football season begins

SUBMITTED AND PHOTOS BY MIKE HEIGHTCHEW

As the future of full contact (tackle) football on the local scene is a bit murky, many parents and participants are turning to flag football as an alternative. Playing in the first competitive games of the season on March 9th, teams of the Fremont Flag Football League were learning the basics of the game including formations and strategic intricacies. The league is open to both boys and girls 5-14 years old.

Fremont Flag Football
(510) 790-5520
<http://www.fremontfootball.org>

