

PLEASE NOTE: THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THE MEETING.
OFFICIAL MINUTES WILL BE POSTED ONCE APPROVED
BY THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP AT THE NEXT MEETING.

MIAMI PALMETTO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PTSA
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
MARCH 25, 2009

The meeting was called to order by President Andrea Shosfy at 7:04 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the February 18, 2009, General Membership Meeting were presented. A motion was made by Jennifer Wollmann to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Nancy Harter and approved.

Treasurer's Report: Treasurer Isabel McBrayer distributed an updated budget. She stated that we need approve the moving of \$3,000 from unallocated funds to FCAT incentives for science. Jennifer Wollmann made a motion to move \$3,000 from Special Projects – Unallocated to FCAT Incentives which was seconded by Nancy Harter. All voted in favor.

Nominating Committee Election: The slate for the Nominating Committee was presented. It includes Claudia Glasson, Anne Flanders, Denise Kranichfeld, Elaine Quartin, and Isabel McBrayer. Nancy Harter made a motion to approve the committee slate. The motion was seconded by Isabel McBride and all voted in favor. Please contact Nancy Harter if you are interested in a volunteer position in a PTSA committee or a shorter-term type of job.

Announcements: Parent chaperones are needed for the Senior Picnic at the zoo next Wednesday, April 1st. All PTSA and booster club members are asked to submit their volunteer hours to Mary Steele at mes6841@hotmail.com. Forms are also available at this meeting to fill in.

School Uniforms: AP Clinton Bales filled in for Principal Howard Weiner due to a sudden illness. He asked that parents be patient and hold off on any specific questions about the uniform vote for about a week. He will be in touch Mr. Weiner by email.

First, he provided some background information. On February 3rd, EESAC decided on a full community vote on the possibility of going to full uniforms for the 2009-2010 school year. Current 9th, 10th, and 11th graders will vote. Uniform policy criteria are on the back of the letter handed out tonight. In anticipation of the vote being approved, we put together some criteria which involved student, administrative, staff and parent perspectives. Only 8 schools out of 50 high schools in Miami-Dade County do not have uniforms.

Second, ballots will go out April 20th to 24th. One ballot will be sent for each child enrolled. If you receive 3 ballots, we are asking you to return all 3. For the vote to pass, we need 50% plus 1 of the returned votes by the deadline. The issue can be addressed every 3 years. Mr. Weiner wanted to let us know that the three main areas that a 'yes for uniforms' vote will benefit are lessening of behavior issues, easier time to identify trespassers, and general safety. Killian High went to uniforms last year. All parents have a vote and you can come see the principal if you choose to request a waiver. As an example, several students were dressed in uniforms. The school uniform colors are, generally, white, navy, Columbia blue, gray, and khaki (see letter and criteria for more specific information).

Program: Teen Alcohol and Drug Abuse: Health Programs Chair, Sima Miska, thanked everyone for coming and thanked the administration for their support of this important program. She introduced our guest speaker, Ray Estefania, Director of the Adolescent Unit at South Miami Hospital Addiction Treatment Center for over 15 years.

Mr. Estefania explained that the program he works with is for teens that are addicted to drugs and need help to stop. He grew up in this community and knows it pretty well. He brought

a few guests tonight to speak to us and is happy to see so many students in the room. One guest is a former Palmetto student who has been through recovery and has been clean for one and one-half years. Her parents are here also and will speak to you about their experience with their daughter's addictions. He feels our community is in an epidemic of drug use -especially Pinecrest, Palmetto Bay, Coral Gables, and South Miami. Middle and upper class kids use the most alcohol and drugs.

The number one drug of choice is marijuana. What kids are smoking today, however, is 15 to 50 times more addictive than what was smoked 20 years ago. It is more potent and more addictive. A lot of parents think it is harmless, but it isn't. Kids are also using drugs at a younger and younger age - 13 or 14 years old. The second most abused item is alcohol. Underage kids are drinking every Friday and Saturday night. The problem is that kids are drinking at younger ages, too.

These actions severely effect brain development. Young kids can't handle alcohol and drugs. They simply aren't mature enough for it. The frontal lobe of the brain is not fully developed when you are a teenager. When you introduce alcohol and drugs to a 14, 15, or 16 year old, you have a recipe for problems. The younger you start, the greater the chance of becoming addicted. The addiction causes conflict with parents, getting in trouble, getting arrested, trouble in school, etc. Many parents have that "kids are kids" attitude or, they all do it, so why should I worry about it. Indirectly, by these messages, they haven't really said it is not okay.

Kids don't drink socially like an adult. They drink in a binge fashion and that is why it is so dangerous. They can't set appropriate limits for themselves. Some parents think it is a phase. The result of that "phase" are that kids end up dead, DUI, overdoses, or end up in treatment with him. The kids end up having all kinds of problems related to alcohol and drug abuse. Kids typically do not stop drinking and doing drugs without intervention. There should be no drinking or drug use at all. He hopes that we all think about it. It is a serious topic. He will stay for a few minutes afterwards if anyone has questions for him, Angela, or her parents.

Angela was a student at Palmetto a little more than a year ago. She is honored to be here tonight and, a year ago, she would have never pictured herself here. About a year ago, she was in Mr. Bales' office after having been found with cigarettes and drug paraphernalia. She started using drugs at 13 or 14 in Mississippi. When she moved to Miami, her drug addiction really kicked off. She was overwhelmed at Palmetto and didn't feel smart enough or good enough. She just wanted to fit in and she did that by using drugs.

At first, it was a social thing but it turned out to be much worse. She was constantly trying to find ways to get more drugs. Getting high was no longer fun. Drugs caused problems with dealing with life on a day to day basis. She had problems with the police, at school, received poor grades, and lost her relationship with her parents. All she did was try to manipulate them to get money for her habit. Her parents saw that something was wrong and, one day, she finally broke down and told them she had a problem. That's when she went to South Miami Hospital and Ray said she had to stop using all drugs. She was in treatment for 3 or 4 months. She stopped hanging out with her old friends and stopped going to the old places where she used to hang out. She got a new group of friends and goes to meetings and has been clean for a year and a half. She can enjoy the simple things in life now without drinking or using drugs. Now she feels like she has a life worth living. She has graduated high school early and is in college. She has a job that she likes and has her parents back.

Mr. Estefania said it was very brave of her to address our group. She was nervous, but felt she had to do it. She grew up in a great family and her parents did many of the right things. She came to show us what drug addicts look like. She looks like any student at this school. She grew up and was into dance and loved her family. Then one day, she made the decision to use alcohol and drugs and that set her life on a totally different path. He sees kids every single day - good kids in good schools with good homes - but one day, maybe through curiosity - they made a decision to try drugs or alcohol on a 13, 14 or 15 year old brain. He is going to continue to drive home the idea that drugs and alcohol are not acceptable in his house with his own 15 year old daughter now just entering high school. He doesn't want to think in the future that he didn't do everything he could to prevent her from using drugs or alcohol.

He then introduced, Vic and Deborah, Angela's parents. Her father, Vic, spoke about having a daughter who became addicted to drugs. She has been clean for 17 months and has

become the loving daughter she used to be. She has graduated high school, is attending MDCC, and works at Victoria's Secret. She is youngest of 5 children who grew up in rural Mississippi with many friends and a loving family. She started to experiment with drugs and alcohol while attending a prestigious Catholic all girls school on the Mississippi coast. Hurricane Katrina forced the family to move to Miami. Once here, her grades began to drop, she had no interest in her personal appearance, had severe mood swings, and associated with undesirables. The parents foolishly dismissed her behavior as typical teen growing years. Angela lost interest in dance and developed an extreme need for privacy. She avoided family gatherings.

One evening when he was out of town traveling, his wife noticed that Angela was upset. She finally broke down and said she was addicted to cocaine and needed help. They went to the South Miami Hospital Addiction Treatment Center. He felt that they were lucky because their daughter did reach out for help. Generally, adolescent users and their parents deny that the problem exists. Anger, fear, guilt, and helplessness paralyze us to do nothing. People need to be empowered to fight addiction to get back to a normal state. She was in her 2nd year at Palmetto when her problems really accelerated.

Treatment taught us, as parents, that we must allow addicts to experience the consequences of their actions and bad decisions. We had to learn to control parental anger - no more yelling. Both parents should be on the same page. There would no more divide and conquer - no more safety net for the addict. We learned to recognize the good and the bad and make a commitment to change for the better.

Do not overlook the obvious. Seek good professional help with trained adolescent addiction experts to bring normalcy back into your life. Now may be the best time to reinvent your parenting skills. As a parent, you can contribute to your child's sobriety. Kids start with drugs they think are harmless and progress. They think they can manage it, but they can't. Mr. Estefania said you know your kids better than anyone. If something just isn't right, the earlier you intervene, the easier it is to correct the problem.

Angela's mom, Deborah, said we had a very disagreeable teenager in our house. She used to be an enabler and write that note to the Admission's Office that said she was sick. Angela was disrespectful and cursed like a sailor. She lost interest in her studies and her future. Within 2 months, she had 4 fender benders and a run in with the police. The school notified her of a detention and that she was smoking cigarettes on the way to school. She worked for a friend of Deborah's and Angela's job was terminated. Her friends still have not told them why she was fired. She was also demanding money from her parents. Deborah experienced guilt and shame and had many sleepless nights. She and her husband were in extreme denial and blinded by the love for their daughter. South Miami provided them with a 'manual' about dealing with adolescent abusers and they learned about enabling. They set guidelines with written contracts and violations resulted in consistent punishments. Deborah learned active listening skills instead of talking at her and we have become very close through this process. We could never have done it without professional help.

The family's bonds are strengthened now because Angela has the choice of her own recovery. Her future is hers, not ours. Angela has many wonderful friends, a boyfriend, and a supportive family. She has fun with her brothers and sisters again. She never asks for any money. Her parents are no longer paranoid of her lifestyle. She has the tools to keep clean and has a network of close, clean friends for support. We are glad she faced her addiction before college and we are proud that we could be part of her recovery.

Mr. Estefania said don't leave here tonight thinking that this can't happen to me. This is not an uncommon journey for kids who use drugs. Not all kids are as successful as Angela and have parents that will do whatever they must willingly to learn to help her succeed. Remember, it is progressive and gets worse over time if not treated. Although it is treatable, the better news is that it is preventable. It starts tonight with parents examining their own attitudes about alcohol and drugs. We want our children to learn from our mistakes, not repeat them.

Ask yourself the tough questions. What are the signs and symptoms of drug or alcohol abuse? Do I set appropriate limits? Do I know my kids whereabouts and friends? It can be difficult, but parents must set consequences for alcohol and drug use. If you do nothing, your child will interpret from you that maybe, it is okay to use drugs and alcohol.

Questions from the audience included:

* Did you tell your kids that you did stuff in high school? No, unless asked. I am not going to lie. Be honest and say you made some mistakes. In our community, the mixing of prescription drugs with alcohol is the trend. Coke is one of the most popular drugs. He sees 14 year old girls who use cocaine to manage their weight.

Prescription meds are a huge problem. There are pamphlets up front to look at before you leave. Often times, kids are getting them right from your medicine cabinet. If you don't need the meds anymore, go home and go through your medicine cabinet and get rid of all those bottles. Zantac is the most popular. It is a sedative for anxiety or to help people sleep. Kids will take Zantac and drink some beers at parties. If you mix the two, they can be deadly and you can easily overdose. Over the counter meds like Robitussin for coughs can be a problem, too. Kids will drink the whole bottle which contains a medicine similar to PCP and you have trip-like experiences. There are no harmless drugs out there. He believes marijuana is just as harmful as the other drugs because it is believed to be harmless. It leads to other things.

* What is the law in Florida regarding drinking and marijuana? He understands that you are not supposed to drink until 21, so can be arrested for under aged drinking. Marijuana is illegal for everybody. You can be charged with possession and can go to jail. Lots of parents will provide alcohol at a party with the idea being "I know he is going to drink, so I would rather he do it here so I can supervise it." If any one of those kids leave and has a car accident, you will lose everything. He knows of a case where a \$10 million lawsuit was filed against the parents of a child who provided alcohol at a party. If you are hosting a party in your house, do you really think your kid is only going to drink there? They will drink everywhere. Parents who have "open house" parties will be prosecuted.

Ms. Miska said there are a lot of materials up front and she again thanked the family and Ray Estefania for coming tonight and sharing their experience. Mr. Estefania will stay after the meeting to answer any additional questions.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Roxy Lancelli,
Recording Secretary

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