

Youth asset-building is goal of

By Charles W. Baum
Staff writer

The home, school and community must all work together to help increase youth assets, some 75 key Pennridge community leaders were told at a Pennridge Area Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth Coalition breakfast Monday morning at the Perkasio Fire House.

"We need to focus on what's right with kids," emphasized Lee Rush, community mobilizer for PAHCHY, with justCommunity Inc., based in Quakertown. "Let's shine the light on the positives."

Pennridge School District Superintendent Dr. Robert Kish agreed there needs to be a better degree of communication between home and school to promote positive behavior. "We must be able to unify care for kids, be consistent in our message and expectations and make

a commitment to the first two, with all of us working together," Kish told the group of business, organization, church, school, police and municipal leaders.

Central to the core philosophy of the program begun in 2000 is the building of the 40 developmental assets in children. A year ago, nearly 1,200 Pennridge students from grades 8, 10 and 12 participated in a 156-question survey on a variety of teen issues, ranging from drug and alcohol use, family life, homework and attitudes toward school.

Rush told the group that Pennridge area youth possess an average of 17.3 assets, slightly below the national average of 18. "Two-thirds of our kids have less than 20 assets. That's not enough. We can do better than that and that's our call to action today."

PAHCHY Chair Lois Dodson, SAP coordinator for the Penn Foundation in Sellersville,

said the goal of the community group is to increase the number of assets in area youth to 21 by 2006 and 31 by 2012. "We want to do things with kids, not for kids," said Dodson.

Pennridge's assets were compared to national data from over 217,000 students in grades 6-12 who were surveyed in 2000.

The survey showed that Pennridge High School seniors, for example, had higher use of alcohol, binge drinking, tobacco and marijuana than national averages, and that use increased from 8th to 10th to 12th grades.

According to the survey, 15 percent of eighth graders, 38 percent of 10th graders and 55 percent of 12th graders said they had used alcohol in the past 30 days. For marijuana use, 10 percent of eighth graders said they had used the drug, 28 percent of 10th graders and 43 percent of 12th graders.

Current trends showed the percentage of Pennridge youth

Pennridge program

who are alcohol free: 80 percent of eighth graders, 60 percent of 10th graders and 40 percent of seniors.

While 70 percent of district students surveyed feel they have family support, only 29 percent feel they have positive family communication and 21 percent say their parents are involved in their education.

Two high school students that have been part of the PAHCHY network spoke about involving youth in the community and how they are helping to try and develop more assets among their peers.

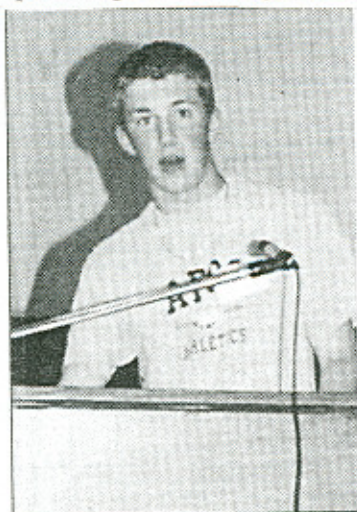
Senior Sean Applegate talked of his involvement in helping to plan the new Perkasio skate park to be built in Lenape Park, across from the Perkasio Square Shopping Center. A skateboarder since age 11, Applegate credited Pennridge Freshman Center teacher Tracy Hill with listening to the kids and starting a skateboard club at the high school.

Sophomore Brad Gery spoke on his involvement at local, regional, state and national levels in attending and leading workshops on community involvement and teamwork.

PAHCHY has received a grant for \$105,000 from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency for a three-year period that began in 2002. The grant is part of the commonwealth's Communities That Care (CTC) initiative begun in 1994. Over 125 Pennsylvania communities are part of the program.

"Many people involved with PAHCHY are community member volunteers who share a vision of seeing the Pennridge area remain a healthy place for kids to grow up in, and we can and must do more," said Rush. "We now have the benchmarks to measure against and we can improve, with all of us having a role to play."

Parents or others who wish to



Pennridge High School sophomore Brad Gery of Perkasio was one of two student speakers at the Pennridge Area Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth breakfast meeting Monday.

volunteer may call him at 215-538-4796.

For complete results of the PAHCHY survey, visit www.justcommunity.com/hchy/pennridge.

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