

Coaches, athletic director honored at the first annual Huddle – High School Student-Athlete Conference



On Tuesday, 118 students from 16 Tulare County high schools attended the first annual Huddle – High School Student-Athlete Conference. The Huddle was held at the Tulare County Office of Education and put on by the CHARACTER COUNTS! (CC!) office's Pursuing Victory with Honor (PVWH) program.

During the conference's lunch, coaches Victoria "Tori" Johnson and Rich Lambie, as well as athletic director John Perez, were honored by the Pursuing Victory with Honor program for their participation and support of PVWH and CHARACTER COUNTS! over the years. The coaches' award is called the "John Forenti Sportsmanship Award" and is named after the CC! program's first coordinator, who held that title from 1994 until 2005.

Victoria "Tori" Johnson, Mt. Whitney High School volleyball coach

Tori Johnson walked into her first CHARACTER COUNTS! training 15 years ago. From that year on, Coach Johnson has been all-in on developing the entire student-athlete. She bought into the T.E.A.M. (Teach, Enforcement, Advocate, Model) concept of including the Six Pillars of Character in her coaching program. She takes time to teach the values and does not hesitate to enforce them even when it may cost the team a point. Regardless of her team or season, Coach Johnson is steadfast in advocating, and most importantly modeling, the core ethical values of Pursuing Victory with Honor.

Rich Lambie, Granite Hills High School coach

During his 45 years of coaching, Rich Lambie developed a Pursuing Victory with Honor (PVWH) Game Plan that the CHARACTER COUNTS! office still uses today as a model for coaches. His PVWH Game Plan includes developing the student-athlete by helping them to make a difference on their campus, in their community, and by having fun. Coach Lambie lives and models a personal code of ethics symbolized by the Six Pillars of Character – trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship. He carries his mission of developing the student-athlete through all avenues. For his students, he inspires them to reach personal physical fitness through a safe student-learning environment where all levels of physical ability experience support and success.

John Perez, Visalia Unified School District / Mt. Whitney High School athletic director

John Perez is a Mt. Whitney High School alumna. He played football and baseball and graduated in 1989. Perez then began his teaching career at Reedley High School in 1994. In the fall of 1995, he started at Mt. Whitney, where he also coached football and baseball, spending four years as the head varsity baseball coach. Perez became the athletic director at Mt. Whitney in the winter of 2008. He remained as the athletic director until August 2022, when he started his new position as Visalia Unified School District's director of athletics. Perez has served Mt. Whitney students for a total of 27 years.

Huddle empowers student-athletes

PVWH's Sportsmanship Action Team, which is made up of high school student-athletes, came up with the Huddle and led breakout sessions - with assistance from professionals. They presented for their peers in the areas of communication, team building, nutrition, collegiate student-athlete preparation, and social media. Along with the breakout sessions, students met and interacted with other students all day through games and activities that encouraged positive sportsmanship, win or lose.



The goal of the Huddle is to empower youth to take back the information they learned and create a school athletic advisory team that will positively impact their team and their school culture.

A middle school version of the Huddle will be held on March 29 for students transitioning into high school athletics. For more information on either the Huddle or PVWH, contact Gene Mendes at genem@tcoe.org. To join the Sportsmanship Action Team, visit tcoe.org/PVWH/SAT.

Photos above:

~ From left to right: Superintendent of Schools Tim Hire, Gene Mendes, coach Rich Lambie, coach Tori Johnson, athletic director John Perez, Kelley Petty, and Kathleen Green-Martins pose for a photo after receiving awards from the CHARACTER COUNTS! and Pursuing Victory with Honor programs.

~ Sportsmanship Action Team member, Alex Elick, speaks during a breakout session on nutrition at the Huddle – High School Student-Athlete Conference.

Tulare County Council on Child & Youth Development to host annual Legislative Event October 20

Registration is now open for the Tulare County Council on Child & Youth Development's 14th Annual Legislative Event. The free event was created for school district and early childhood educators, legislators and county officials, and other leaders in children services to learn ways they can increase access to early learning for Tulare County children.

Nationally recognized attorney, child advocate, author, and lecturer Elizabeth Huntley will be the event's keynote speaker. Huntley practices law at Lightfoot, Franklin & White, LLC in Birmingham, Alabama. She is the recipient of many professional honors and awards, including membership in The National Black Lawyers Top 100 organization. Huntley's published memoir is entitled *More Than A Bird*.



In addition to her work as an attorney, Huntley is the president and cofounder of the Hope Institute, an organization in Alabama that helps schools build a culture of character for their students. She is also a leader in the movement to expand access to high quality Pre-K for every four-year-old in the state.

The 14th Annual Legislative Event will be held from 8:30 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. October 20 at TCOE's Mooney Boulevard Administration Building in Visalia. Breakfast will be provided. Registration is available at <https://bit.ly/3qv4bGL>.

Registration now open for Expanding Your Horizons

Registration is now open for Expanding Your Horizons (EYH), the popular STEM-based conference for young women. The conference is designed for young women in grades 4-10 to enlighten and spark interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. EYH helps attendees discover how interesting and fun math and science can be, form personal contacts with women working in STEM occupations, and dream big to follow career paths traditionally pursued by men.



EYH will be held November 5 at College of the Sequoias in Visalia and will include dozens of interactive breakout sessions led by women working in STEM fields. Attendees will enjoy sessions such as engineering a bridge, robotics, forensics, and more. Registration is \$20 per student and is open through October 28. Group and individual registration forms can be found at tcoe.org/EYH.

Photo above:

~ Girls at the annual *Expanding Your Horizons* event attend four fun and interactive breakout sessions led by women working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics professions.

Around the County

Monson-Sultana Joint Union School holds groundbreaking



Last Friday, Monson-Sultana Joint Union School held a groundbreaking for its long-awaited student activity center and library/classroom building. The school's honor choir opened the ceremony with a performance of "CHARACTER COUNTS!," a song written and conducted by music director Mary Pauls.

Superintendent Roberto Vaca shared with the crowd that the two buildings, which are designed using modular systems with a combined 13,000 square feet of space, are scheduled to be completed next spring. The larger building will feature a gymnasium, while the smaller building will house two classrooms and the school's library.



Photos above:

~ Shovels and helmets are set up for Monson-Sultana Joint Union School's groundbreaking last Friday.

~ Renderings show Monson-Sultana Joint Union School's future student activity center, left, and library/classroom building.

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