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Group starts teen behavior class: Seminar in Chaparral aims to educate youth about gangs through intervention, prevention [Alamogordo Daily News, N.M.]

Jan. 15--A Respect/Manners/Attitude/Relationships class will be conducted in Chaparral on Jan. 24 to educate teens about proper behavior.

Rob Gallardo, director of Aryba Texas-New Mexico Operation No Gangs, said his organization has been offering the class in the El Paso area for about two years, but Jan. 24 will be the first time the class will be offered in Chaparral.

Operation No Gangs is an organization Gallardo started in 2000 to educate people about gangs through intervention and prevention seminars. He said his organization started the manners class when some El Paso area judges approached him and requested such a class be developed.

"Some of the judges in the El Paso area were concerned about the behavior of some of the students when they approached the judges," Gallardo said.

He said some students' clothing and demeanor were "not up to par" for their court appearances. Gallardo said during a number of interagency meetings, he noticed people talking about manners have disappeared among youth and parents were no longer taking an interest in passing along those manners to their kids.

Gallardo noted with the explosion of cell phones and the Internet, young people seem more self-centered and isolated. He's seen them sending text messages while driving, displaying unusual behavior on MySpace and more.

He said his class is not just about basic etiquette, but proper behavior in classroom situations, sitting up straight and interruptions, as well as addressing the issue of boyfriends and girlfriends who inappropriately display affection in public. The class also attempts to focus on intercultural and intergender situations.

"People over 50 don't take kindly to cussing," Gallardo observed. "We tell kids (vulgar language) the expression of a weak mind trying to express itself forcefully."

In addition to profanity, Gallardo said the class addresses other issues concerning verbal communication.

"For example, some expressions I never liked 'to tell you the truth,'" Gallardo said. "That means you're going to lie to me?"

The class also discusses proper behavior in restaurants, like taking only what one can eat at an all-you-can-eat buffet, not wasting napkins, leaving a 15 percent tip and washing hands.

He said there is also a section on proper conduct in sacred places, including cemeteries, churches, libraries, schools and other people's homes. He noted other things are sacred as well, such as the military, little children, the sick, the disabled, the environment and people's own rooms

"We can't just go in and do what we want to," Gallardo said.

He said one of the many positive things about the class is that young people also make presentations, taking sections and discussing attitude, behavior in public places and more.

"So it adds a spin from a child's perspective," Gallardo said.

To attend the class, cost is \$4 for a self-referral and \$7 for court- or school-ordered referral. Gallardo explained that if a court or school wants to send a student, his organization issues a certificate and report to the referring institution. The price difference is to cover the extra effort made for that referral. Plus, they maintain contact with the person after they take the class and do follow-up.

"We also feel that, with people who have gone to court, we see individuals who feel entitled," Gallardo said. "So we charge them more."

He said self-referral is often the result of students being sent by their parents. Police, teachers and others often recommend the class to parents of unruly teens, and sometimes parents make inquiries directly about the class. He noted often they find 13-, 14- and 15-year-olds displaying "weirdness" or selfish behavior that their parents would like to mitigate.

Gallardo thinks the class is most effective for that age range, although he acknowledged he has no way of gauging effectiveness.

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