

Rancho Santa Fe residents work to break the cycle of homelessness

Judy Roberts acknowledges that the stories and images of children sleeping on the streets initially frightened her. That fear and the desire to help led to her most recent community post serving as a board member and head of the Outreach Committee for Monarch School in downtown San Diego. She joins Rancho Santa Fe resident Mark McLaren on the board. In concert with 22 other board members throughout San Diego County, Roberts and McLaren are working diligently to help put an end to the cycle of homelessness through quality education.

Monarch School is a K-12 public school established exclusively for homeless and at-risk youth. Monarch School exemplifies an ideal public-private partnership between the San Diego County Office of Education and the Monarch School Project, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, as it fulfills students' basic needs (shelter, food, medical services, clothing, shower, transportation and an after-school program) to empower youth to focus on education while removing all barriers to regular school attendance. Monarch is one of only three schools throughout the U.S. specifically established for homeless students, and the only public school of its kind with a non-profit partnership to supplement students' basic needs.

Today, there are more than 2,200 homeless youth in San Diego alone. Monarch School's population has grown approximately 60 percent since fall 2009, now serving between 150 and 160 students at any given time. And while the average student arrives at Monarch School three years behind grade level, recent test scores show that for every six months a student attends Monarch, he or she will progress more than one year academically.

Thanks to the generous efforts of Roberts, McLaren, their fellow board members, Monarch School faculty and staff, and the community, Monarch School will break ground on its new campus in East Village-Barrio Logan, just south of Petco Park, in summer 2011 to serve more than double its current student population.

Roberts notes, "I have worked with a number of charities over the years and Monarch School became one of my interests because it really pulls at my heart. My personal hope and goal is to create an after-school program of theater arts and speech once the new campus opens." A fitting goal since Roberts graduated from Arizona State University as a theater arts major and speech minor. She went on to become a flight attendant and teacher, then a commercial airline pilot with UPS. Today, Roberts resides in Rancho Santa Fe with her husband, Bill.

McLaren is a commercial real estate investor, San Diego native and, in addition to serving as a board member for Monarch School, he has given his time and expertise to organizations that include the downtown San Diego Rotary Club, Junior Achievement, San Diego Taxpayers Association, and others, even serving as a youth baseball and soccer coach. McLaren graduated from San Diego State University as an economics major with a minor in marketing and business administration. McLaren and his wife, Kathy also reside in Rancho Santa Fe.

McLaren lends his professional knowledge to the school and, as he explains, "Monarch School is a wonderful cause serving San Diego's most disadvantaged youth. I'm very excited about the opportunity to apply my real estate development background toward making this new and expanded campus a reality for Monarch."

For more information on supporting the Monarch School, visit www.monarchschoools.org or call (619) 685-8242, Ext. 227.