

# Newsletter



RITE OF PASSAGE

Winter 2010

*Improving the lives of youth*

## Stellar Start to Academy's Second Year

On October 15, Silver Oak Academy (SOA) marked its second year of operations with an Open House celebration that recognized community, civic and business partners as well as individual volunteers.

Headlining the event was guest motivational speaker and Baltimore native Brian Jordan, one of the few rare and gifted athletes who attained all-star status in both the NFL (Atlanta Falcons) and MLB (Atlanta Braves). Mr. Jordan encouraged Silver Oak Academy's 46 student-athletes in attendance as well as a crowd of 100 partners, parents and supporters, to follow their dreams and not allow the negative or low expectations of others to limit or hinder their efforts. A video featuring Mr. Jordan's two professional careers highlighted the hour-long program.



Motivational Guest Speaker, Brian Jordan, provided words of encouragement and wisdom to all who attended

for community service and recreational activities for SOA students.

Ms. Betty Buffington, owner of B & B Enterprises, was given the "Business Partner of the Year" award for supplying customized monogrammed uniforms and items to SOA sports teams and staff.

Finally, Pastors Charles Clark and Gene Ritter, were recognized for their efforts as volunteer chaplains for the campus, leading weekly non-denominational services since SOA's opening. They have also coordinated community service efforts for students to prepare, serve food and provide clean-up services at the Westminster Soup Kitchen.

After the ceremony, SOA culinary staff provided a luncheon of finger foods, fruit, snacks and cake in the lobby of the Workforce Development Building. Other officials attending the event included Department of Justice's Licensing Director Mary Eggleston, Placement Supervisor Robert Shipman, Rite of Passage President Ski J. Broman and members of ROP's Quality Assurance team including, Susan Sellars, CJ Bower, Bill Wood, John Fry, Jay Koedam, Matthew Gosting, Karen Murray, Ingrid Mann and Marie Culpepper.

### WHAT'S INSIDE

- Industry News .....2
- Program News .....3
- Staff Update .....3
- Sports .....4

Guest speakers included U.S. Congressman Roscoe Bartlett (Sixth District), and Maryland State Senator David Brinkley. Both speakers praised the efforts of the students as well as the academy's in helping to change the lives of youth placed by the Maryland Department of Juvenile Justice at Silver Oak Academy's Keymar campus.

Two students, Tevin M. and Hugh M., delivered their Validate addresses, which identified the decisions and changes they had made during the time they were attending SOA. Both students were graduates of the program and were looking forward to returning home to complete high school in their local communities.

The culmination of the event was the recognition and awards presented to community members who had supported SOA and its students over the past year with outstanding service. The City of Taneytown was awarded the "Community Partner of the Year" for efforts in providing opportunities



First Parent/Teacher Conference Proves to be a Success See Article Page 3

### Developing Staff Knowledge Skills and Attitudes

#### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Numerous juvenile justice researchers have reported the importance of qualified staff. Personnel who follow treatment program guidelines, while establishing positive relationships with offenders and demonstrating pro-social behaviors and interactions (Gendreau 1996; Andrews 2007). Many researchers and practitioners recommend that correctional organizations improve staff professionalism and provide extensive training in clinical supervision based on Risk/Need/Responsivity guidelines. This is referred to as the What Works research (Latessa & Lowenkamp 2006). These same researchers and practitioners maintain that staff also need further training in core relationship skills and treatment management.

As part of its commitment to building an evidence-based program model, Rite of Passage is developing and retaining professional, informed staff. Staff knowledge, skills, and attitudes are an important building block to the foundation of an effective program. Nurturing a learning organization whose focus is evolving evidence-based programming creates competency that is engrained in the culture. The process of developing staff that can effectively implement an evidence-based practice model of residential facilities for at-risk youth requires implementation of core competencies, successful technology transfer, and leadership.

#### IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

Rite of Passage has chosen to implement core competencies developed by Dr. Edward Latessa and his staff at the University of Cincinnati. These competencies were created using meta-analysis to review what works in juvenile corrections. These nine core competencies are; Use of risk/need assessment, assessing and addressing responsivity, development and use of individual treatment plans, program design and cognitive behavioral management systems, program implementation, staff characters and roles, quality assurance and fidelity, and aftercare.

Through the use of technology transfer, a term Purdue University cites "...transform nascent scientific discoveries into products and services available for the public good" (Technology Transfer at Purdue University, 2008), Dr. Latessa and his colleagues at the University of Cincinnati are helping to transition not just Rite of Passage, but the juvenile justice industry.

Each time a learning organization begins to transition or change, it is imperative that leadership implement and guide the change. This is particularly true of the juvenile justice industry, where change can impact not only the staff, but the clients that they serve. "Changing organizations requires leadership that may not always be available in juvenile justice...scarcity of sound research on training (i.e., its effectiveness) has been among the most glaring shortcomings in the leadership area." (Cohn & Crim, 2004).

To establish effective change initiatives, leadership must identify the messengers of change that will have the most impact of passing on skills sets to front line staff. Rite of Passage leadership accomplished this by implementing concepts from Malcom Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point*. The book implies that to create an epidemic of change an important factor is the "Law of the Few." This Law imparts that there are three types

of people who will be most effective in ensuring that the development of skills sets are sustainable, and that there is "buy in" to the necessity of the change in the organization (Gladwell, 2000). For Rite of Passage, these three types were identified as Crusaders, Champions, and Stakeholders.

In March, 2010 identified Crusaders, Champions, and Stakeholders were invited to begin a year-long "Intensive Leadership Training" program developed by Dr Latessa and his colleagues for the University of Cincinnati. This first of its kind certificate program would allow staff to experience first-hand the necessity of transitioning the organization, as well as increasing their knowledge skills and abilities in core competencies proven to reduce the recidivism rates of incarcerated juveniles.

Over the course of a year, Rite of Passage leadership will provide learning opportunities to the participants of the training, and the Crusaders and Champions will disseminate the information in detail to stakeholders and front line staff at their respective facilities. This will ensure the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of each competency are addressed individually and in detail.



*Leadership participates in evidence-based skill development at May 2010 Dr. Latessa Training*

In May of 2010, Crusaders, Champions, and Stakeholders gathered for their first in-person training with Dr. Latessa. During the training and breakout sessions, the dialogue that emerged began to set the course for staff development utilizing evidence-based core competencies.

#### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE JUVENILE JUSTICE INDUSTRY?

The ability to create a culture of evidence-based competencies will have a tremendous impact on positive behavior changes and recidivism rates for at-risk youth. The ability to assess, benchmark, and replicate systems that provide proven reductions in recidivism rates for juveniles will create needed additional subject matter experts (SME's) in the juvenile justice industry.

#### Work Cited

- Gendreau, P. (1996). *The Principles of Effective Interventions with Offenders*. In Alan T. Harland (Ed.), *Choosing Correctional Options That Work: Defining the Demand and Evaluating the Supply*. (pp. 117-130). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Latessa, E.J., & Lowenkamp, C.T. (2006). *What Works in Reducing Recidivism?* *University of St. Thomas Law Journal*. 3 (3), pp. 521-535. *Technology Transfer at Purdue University. Purdue Research Foundation. Office of Technology Commercialization. January, 2008.*
- Cohn, Alvin W., Crim, D., *Planning for the Future of Juvenile Justice. Federal Probation. Volume 68. Number 3. December, 2004.*
- Gladwell, Malcom. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Little Brown Publishing, 2000.

## SOA Student Services Department



SOA's Student Services Department  
Left to Right: Mr. Thomas, Ms. Plunkert,  
Mr. Kurtz and Ms. Wunderlich

The first line of contact at Silver Oak Academy for most students, families and placement officials is the case manager. Soon after Joe Kurtz, Director of Student Services, joined the team in May, he added two case managers, Nicole Plunkert and Robert Thomas. Both manage caseloads of 24 students, working directly with students in the living units and their daily activities.

Ms. Plunkert is a Licensed Social Worker Associate with a Bachelor of Arts in Social Work and a minor in Psychology. She has worked previously as a substance abuse counselor and will facilitate the Pathways Substance Abuse groups. She has also worked as a treatment coordinator in the foster care system and has effectively developed the trust of students and families at SOA.

Mr. Thomas has his Ph.D. in divinity and is a Baltimore native. He has taught previously in the public school system and worked seven months as a group living staff before his promotion. He leads the "Thinking for a Change" groups along with servicing his caseload of 24 students.

The latest addition is LCSW Ms. Courtney Wunderlich, who provides counseling services, development of treatment plans and oversight of transitional planning for SOA graduates. She has quickly gained the respect of students and staff and is an effective facilitator of the treatment process. She also provides the clinical interface with Behavioral Health Partners, a group of mental health professionals in the Frederick area that provides medication management, psychological evaluations and psychiatric assessments for students at SOA. She works with families providing family group training.

The main function of these staff is to help the students facilitate their own change in behavior through raising awareness, imparting social interaction skills and reinforcing positive choices and decisions. At SOA, the goal of the program is to assist students to build strengths and experience achievement in a variety of education, vocational, recreational and behavioral areas. Each student assists in developing an individualized treatment plan that will maximize their potential in gaining new ways of thinking and skills that will enable positive behaviors. Each of these Student Service staff has demonstrated the abilities to assist SOA students achieve these goals.

## FAMILIES ATTEND FIRST PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE AT SOA



Parents met one-on-one with teachers to discuss their son's academic progress

Silver Oak Academy hosted its first Parent/Teacher Conference on Sunday, October 24, 2010, from 10:30am-12:30pm. Education Department teachers and administrative staff were present to discuss the educational progress of each young man with their parents and guardians. A student's education can be greatly impacted by their parent's/guardian's involvement in the educational journey. There were over 40 family members in attendance reviewing student report cards, transcripts, and individual achievement status.

Parents started their day with a meet and greet by school administrators, guidance counselor, and school social worker. Parents toured the school and were provided with a copy of their son's schedule so that they would be able to attend each academic class. Parents were scheduled one-on-one time with teachers to individually address their son's academic progress.

For the juniors and seniors, parents and students met with the guidance counselor to discuss post-secondary opportunities. Information packets on colleges, employment and community agencies were made available. These Parent/Teacher Conferences open doors to a professional collaboration between parents, teachers, and students. Parents witnessed classroom activities, communicated directly with teachers and interacted with SOA's professional education staff. Silver Oak Academy will host their second Parent/Teacher Conference during the second semester of this school year in Spring 2011.



PSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
MINDEN, NV  
PERMIT NO. 94

**Rite of Passage**  
**Silver Oak Academy**  
999 Crouse Mill Road  
P.O. Box 250  
Keymar, MD 21757  
Phone (410) 775-1745  
Fax (410) 775-0242  
www.riteofpassage.com  
www.silveroakacademy.com



Equal Opportunity Employer



## Silver Oak's Football Team Came To Play



**RAMS show team unity as they prepare to take on their next opponent**

The Ram's football program completed its second season with a 5-5 record and a fifth place ranking amongst independent football programs in Maryland.

The team started their season out with four straight wins, outscoring opponents 168 to 0. The team then went on to play some of the top ranked teams in the state over the next five weeks of the season. These games were played against teams that had a combined record of 46 wins, 3 losses, and all playoff bound.

The Rams played hard against each opponent, tackling each game with courage and perseverance. The Ram's highlight game of the season was against two-time State champions, Linganore High School. The Rams scored twice in the first half on the defending State champions, while Rams running back, student-athlete Craig O., lead the charge running

for 112 yards for the game. The Rams also celebrated their first one thousand yard rusher who also scored 21 touchdowns this season.

The most important tradition started at Silver Oak Academy Ram's Football is the "Circle of Fellowship", which occurs after each game with the opposing team. This tradition allows the players and coaches of each team to gather in the middle of the field to share what they've learned from each other. "It is a time to give praise to our opponent and share in prayer together," shared Head Coach Kevin McLeod. The Circle of Fellowship was designed to model for our student-athletes how to develop friendships through healthy competition.

The Rams celebrated the end of a successful season with their annual fall athletic awards banquet held on December 1, to recognize 28 football players (and two cross-country runners). It was an inspirational evening as coach Kevin McLeod, his assistants, and several guests gave speeches, while highlights from the football season played behind them.