

Mukwonago High SAVE working to inspire students, community

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(Photo: Submitted)

SAVE (Students Against Violence Everywhere) is one club at Mukwonago High School that looks to not only inspire high-schoolers within the school, but in other elementary and middle schools and the community, as well.

SAVE started in 2006 with English teacher Sarah Dianich. She started the club after a principal with whom she had worked with at a high school in Cazenovia, Wisconsin, died after struggling to remove a handgun from a student.

"When I went to the funeral, held at Weston's diminutive K-12 gym, I recalled a community much like our own — close-knit, rural, and typically violence-free. I realized that it only takes one moment to shake that feeling of safety to its core," Dianich remembered. "My friends and past colleagues who were there when it happened will never be the same."

After the incident, Dianich and other students together started the first SAVE chapter for MHS. SAVE promotes non-violence throughout the school and community, informs people about the consequences of violence and bullying, and works to create a safe environment for students to avoid poor decision-making.

Throughout the year, SAVE offers and creates various projects for the school. America's Safe Schools Week advocates for non-violence through lunchroom competitions, pledge signing, Orange and Purple Day (SAVE's colors), and more. SAVE runs the Penny Wars during the holiday season to donate money to the Women's Center in Waukesha and encourages safe driving practices, too.

Outside of school, SAVE also visits with middle and elementary school students to support anti-bullying and demonstrate what SAVE does at the high school level.

In the upcoming weeks of February, SAVE members plan to take a field trip to Rolling Hills Elementary School. They will meet with their SAVE buddies for the first time since writing back and forth as pen-pals a few times.

Tess Adams, a freshman at MHS, said, "It's important to teach kids at the elementary and middle schools about SAVE in order to prevent the bullying sooner."

The Rolling Hills Elementary School chapter has already started projects to promote positivity in the school, such as keeping the school grounds clean by not littering and creating colorful posters with cheerful messages. While these activities are effectively spreading SAVE's message, Dianich is certain that the MHS SAVE members will make a large impact on the students.

"It's so important for older students to mentor younger students, as they are the role models to their younger counterparts. Kids tend to hear the same directives, rules, and lessons from adults, over and over until it may lose its efficacy. Coming from older students, that message becomes that much more meaningful," Dianich believes.

SAVE is a special club at MHS that, like Key Club and Best Buddies, gives students the opportunity to help others in return for the feeling of satisfaction.

"I get to feel good after doing service projects with the school. I get to first-hand see the benefits of this club," Adams replied.

Even for those who aren't in the club, everyone can demonstrate SAVE's message.

"Be a kind person, stand up for others, and never, ever, participate in bullying or violent behavior. It's simpler than it seems," Dianich summed up.