



By Cammie Bellamy StarNews Staff

WILMINGTON -- Every single day Mack Lancaster tells her friend at Laney High School how great she looks.

"Sometimes I'm not here but I text her anyways: 'you look great today,' " she said. "She's like, 'You're not even here,' but I'm like, 'You look great today.' "

It's Lancaster's personal philosophy that simple acts of kindness keep the world spinning. For a classmate who's struggling with depression or anxiety, kind words can be life-saving.

That concern for others led Lancaster to Laney's chapter of Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE), a North-Carolina-based nonprofit with 2,100 school chapters in 48 states. On Saturday she and a handful of Laney SAVE-ers will present at the group's national summit in Raleigh.

Graduation coach Beth Scheirer has **advised Laney's SAVE chapter for a decade**. She estimated this was the chapter's fifth time presenting at the summit, making it one of the most active in the state.

"We're about being good role models and empowering our peers to stand up if they see things that aren't right," she said.

Throughout the year, SAVE hosts events focused on mental health, peer pressure and bullying.



▲ HIDE CAPTION

1/2

Junior Victoria Chang takes notes during a meeting Monday of Laney High School's chapter of Students Against Violence Everywhere. [CAMMIE BELLAMY/STARNEWS]



▲ HIDE CAPTION

2/2

Members of Laney High School's chapter of Students Against Violence Everywhere meet Monday to plan their presentation at the group's national summit. Left to right: adviser Beth Scheirer, junior Victoria Chang, senior Mack Lancaster, sophomore Eric Guetta. [CAMMIE BELLAMY/STARNEWS]

Students hold an annual "Out of the Darkness" walk for suicide prevention. Members visit elementary schools and read "Twenty Twinkling Stars," a children's book that celebrates the 20 youngest victims of the 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting in Newtown, Conn. On National Random Acts of Kindness Day, SAVE-ers handed out pieces of paper bearing compliments.

The group's presentation in Raleigh will focus on stereotypes about teenagers. Using X-rays as an analogy, Laney's chapter will push participants to think about what they miss when they focus only on a teen's appearance.

Violence has occasionally touched local teens in dramatic ways. **Hoggard High School student Raymond Kain** was killed in a shooting earlier this month; another Hoggard student, **Shane Simpson**, was killed the year before.

Junior Victoria Chang said many more students are struggling with less visible violence: bullying, drugs, self-harm. She joined SAVE to help students realize they can lift each other up.

"There's a quote: 'Don't look for a leader -- just stand up, look in the mirror and take charge,'" Chang said. "It's something that I really want to live by."

"If someone went out of their way to like, say 'Good morning' to someone or hold the door for someone, everything would change," Lancaster agreed. "The little boy down the street wouldn't be holding a gun in his hand, he'd be holding a paintbrush or something. Just the smallest bit of happiness can change someone."