

New MSA club seeks to eliminate stereotypes

Muslim Student Association club provides space for Muslim students

by Layla Saqibuddin

On Feb. 15, NT approved MSA, which stands for Muslim Student Association.

MSA is a 50-year-old national organization with over 100 chapters in the United States and Canada in both colleges and high schools. In the Chicago area, Niles North, Niles West, Stevenson, Main West, and Maine East High schools implemented an (Islamic) Club.

NT was an outlier among neighboring high schools and universities in the Chicago area.

In fact, according to club sponsor and English teacher Kiran Subhani, students have been trying to get the club started for over a decade.

However, according to Student Activities Director Stacy Kolack, the reasoning behind the long process of approving MSA club is because students were very busy with school and some may have taken longer on filling out paperwork.

In addition, Student Alliance President Bill Yen said, "The leaders of MSA spent a lot of time trying to find the perfect balance between creating a club that is educating students about Islam and a club that promotes the religion, which they unfortunately cannot do in a public school."

However, Yen knew how much time MSA club has worked with Stacy Kolack on improving their plan for the club, and finally passed the club because they believed that they did a good job of planning and working out the details.

According to the club's proposal, MSA has two main purposes: "It will serve Muslim students by providing them with a space where they can

be around other Muslims, which can be difficult in the NT community. Second, it serves the students and faculty by educating them about Islam."

Subhani believes it's important for students to feel connected and welcomed especially to a high school that contains a majority of caucasian population."

"For students who are Muslim, it's important for them to have a space where they don't feel isolated. In this club, students can develop a sense of confidence in their faith. We hope that this club and its members will give each other a sense of identity and confidence so that it's easy for students to acclimate as much as possible within white American culture," said Subhani.

Whereas for the club's student leaders it was even more important to have dialogue with students who have misconceptions about Islam.

Senior and MSA head Farah Qureshi believes while the school

can often seem like a very accepting community, there are still situations where students who belong to a minority group can feel out of place.

"I think that the school's administration and students should take the initiative to identify and fix these situations, because there are visible repercussions."

In addition, this club will provide a need to eliminate any negative stereotypes about Islam in the township. Though it might not seem like it, these stereotypes exist towards Muslim students.

In fact, according to the club's proposal: "One of the potential members wore a niqab, and has stated that she had grown accustomed to uncomfortable stares and questions about her behind her back. She wished that they would have directly asked her questions, rather than making assumptions about her. By educating student and faculty, we can show them how to deal with unfamiliar situations regarding Muslims."

Similarly, Subhani said Muslim youth often think that they have to choose between being Muslim and being American.

"Having an MSA can help students balance this issue and even help Muslim students who are suffering from an identity crisis."

According to Yen, since SA is primarily a policy-driven group, they currently don't have any plans to do anything specifically to promote or bring awareness to Islam.

However, he said that SA will do anything they can to help out clubs.

"We are the leader of clubs, so we will do what we can to help clubs like MSA, Club Israel, etc. should they decide that they would like to spearhead an event like Islamic/other religion/ethnic awareness week and would like our help for the logistical aspects of the project," said Yen.

Mental health specialist panel educates NT parents



Over 60 parents attended the event about adolescent depression | Sussman

by Hannah Sussman

In an effort to educate parents and students on mental health, specifically depression, the school invited several panelists to introduce the topic as well as answer audience produced questions.

The panel was made up of representatives from Willow House, Haven Youth and Family Services, Erika's Lighthouse, and Dr. Jonathan Singer, an expert on adolescent depression from Loyola University.

The event began just after 7:00pm with an audience of about 60 parents and 10 students. Upon entering Cornog Auditorium, each audience member was offered a piece of paper to write a question to ask the panel.

Questions asked by the audience, and selected by principal Denise Dubravec, lead the event to focus on the signs of depression in adolescents, with a secondary focus on the treatment of depression.

The signs outlined included over- and under-sleeping and eating, withdrawal from previous interests, extreme moodiness, and other changes in personality.

Beyond the signs of depression, Singer also described factors that may increase the likelihood of depression. He cited poverty, high stress, as well as a family history of depression as being just a few of these factors.

On the home front, it was suggested that parents listen and talk with their child to better understand their wellbeing. For parents that struggle to talk with their child, this included strategies such as finding common interests as well as talking in the car.

Additionally, several different styles of therapy as well as different programs were introduced over the course of the evening as methods to help with depression.

Singer, as well as the representatives from the other groups,

agreed that there is no one magic pill that can be taken to cure depression, and often solutions involve a mixture of therapy and if needed medication as well.

Patricia Sheridan, Junior Girls' Adviser Chair at New Trier, emphasized the schools willingness to create custom plans for individuals in need of help that may interfere with academics.

Sheridan explained that certain accommodations must be made for individuals participating in after school intensive programs.

"The student doesn't have five hours after school to do homework" acknowledged Sheridan.

The school also reported that social work has had at least one meeting with 25% of students. This percentage shows the many students the school is able to aid through the social work department.

Beyond social work, the school also trains each teacher in QPR (Question. Persuade. Refer.) a training course that teaches teachers to recognize suicidal ideations and warning signs.

While the panel was in agreement that the rates of depression have increased in recent years, the discussion focused mainly on parental action rather than conversations among peers in a school setting.

The event was exclusively advertised to parents, despite the center of conversation being on teen mental health. The lack of information given to students left most students unaware of the event's existence.

Within the forum the school representatives highlighted their efforts to bring these conversations into the students' lives, citing units in the freshmen health class as examples of such incorporation.

The event concluded with the question of how mental health awareness will be applied to the lives of the students.

New Trier hosts 25th winter carnival

Senior class brings community together to raise money for Habitat

by Grant Feldman

On Mar. 15, New Trier hosted its 25th annual winter carnival at the traditional campus from 5:30-9 p.m. The carnival is one of the most popular events in the community.

Senior adviser rooms hosted more than 45 booths, according to senior adviser co-chair Chris Pearson. Popular activities included the 3-point basketball shootout, Mario Kart competition, and whiffle ball home run derby. This year, the school had a contract with Record-A-Hit Entertainment to bring in new activities such as bumper cars, inflatables, and Putt Putt Golf.

"It was a way for the senior class to create something fun for the community," said retired senior adviser chair Tom Tebbe, who was around for the first winter carnival.

"They're able to do service-oriented types of work, giving back but also a chance for them to think about what they're going to do with the funds they raise," said Tebbe.

To raise funds, senior advisories have to ask local businesses for donations, along with making posters and other promotions for their booths, providing an opportunity to practice marketing and entrepreneurship skills.

The inaugural carnival was in 1996, conducted by former adviser chairs Larry Rehage and Janice Dreis. The inspiration for the carnival came from the lab school at the University of Chicago, which hosted yearly carnivals. Though this year marked the 25th anniversary of the winter carnival, not a whole lot has changed.

"The basic format is the same, though it has become more streamlined over the years," said Tebbe. "It used to be from 6 to 10 p.m., before Spring Break usually. There is a lot of the same advertising, trying to get the same sponsors to support it, either through some direct contribution to the winter carnival such as donating pizza or other food items, or indirectly through the auction."

Another part that has stayed



Popular activities included whiffle ball, Mario Kart and basketball | Kass

the same throughout the years is the carnival's popularity among the locals. Hundreds of kids enjoy the dozens of activities, games, and raffles that are set up by the Senior class each year. Many seniors who run stations at the carnival also attended the carnival as kids, making it a memorable event.

"It struck me seeing seniors interacting with the young kids," Tebbe said. "It's nice seeing them put down their phones and stepping out of their usual practices of interacting with one another. They focus on making sure the kids have a good time and do a good job taking care of them and having a good flow of activities to participate in," said Tebbe.

For the first six years of the carnival, the Senior Senate would select a charity to receive the carnival funds. Often the money would go to children's cancer foundations such as Bear Necessities. But in 2000, the

senior class decided to partner with Habitat for Humanity to raise money for families in need and fulfill their service project requirement.

With free admission and parking, along with \$1 tickets for different activities, the carnival has used the funds raised for Habitat for Humanity to help build residences in Waukegan and the Philippines. The school's press release said that they have helped build 38 homes over 19 years. Senior advisories pick a day for their service project, which typically is a field trip to build part of one of these houses.

"The carnival is a nice event for the community. Everyone comes in expecting to have a decent time. The biggest challenge is probably keeping everyone occupied. There were never any [major controversies]. That's a testament to the seniors," said Tebbe.