



RITE OF PASSAGE

Silver State Academy

# Newsletter

Fall 2008

*Improving the lives of youth*

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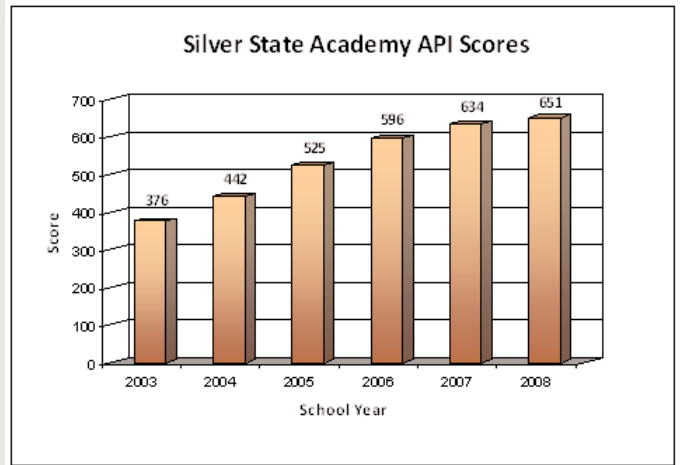


SSA's cross country team burst onto the scene in 2008. For more action shots of the RAMS, turn to page 4-5.

## Outstanding Academic Achievement at SSA

The teachers at Silver State Academy have recently analyzed student achievement data from the 2007-2008 school year and they're tremendously pleased with the results. For the fifth straight year, the school raised its California Academic Performance Index (API) which now stands at 651 and represents a significant improvement from the score of 376, just a few years ago. Realistically, some California comprehensive high schools simply can't lay claim to our level of performance or improvement.

The API is one of California's measurement tools used to gauge how well students are learning. California's API growth target rate for schools that have a base score below 690 points is an increase of five percent of the difference between the previous year's base number and the current year's score. The state's overall performance target is 800. According to the data,



The staff also analyzed data highlighting the level of growth occurring in a given amount of time. After only four months of instruction, the data revealed that the average student advanced a full grade level in mathematics. Learning at a faster rate than they would at a typical comprehensive school is important for SSA students who often have serious "catching up" to do. This has prompted the staff to implement a curriculum focused on essential skills. They've also adopted a nationally recognized, research-based instructional model called *Response to Intervention* which aids in providing multiple layers of support for struggling learners.

The teachers know that their students must become proficient in reading and math to have any chance of success in life. Therefore, they've made a commitment to continually improve the students' opportunities to learn. Data shows that this approach is working... but the

job is never done. Staff will continue to use data to identify needs, target future goals, and then work to achieve them.

School or Subgroup 2007 Base API	2007-08 Growth Target
200 - 690	5 percent of the difference between the Base API and the statewide performance target of 800
691 - 795	gain of 5 points
796	gain of 4 points
797	gain of 3 points
798	gain of 2 points
799	gain of 1 point
800 or more	must maintain an API of at least 800

Silver State Academy's students succeeded in exceeding the recommended growth rate by more than doubling their percentage (11.4%) from last year. This is exceptionally phenomenal considering its unique student population.

# Program News

From the Desk of....

**Mike DeBusk**

*Program Director, Silver State Academy*

New Year's Day inevitably brings with it the tradition of making New Years resolutions, which are a formal expression of intention, leading to a solution or settling of a problem.



During a recent all-site assembly, I intended to address our students regarding the "Focus of the Week" and a range of observed behaviors that had not seemed to diminish or be eliminated, despite constant confrontation by staff. As I began my talk, I found myself not telling the student body that we would continue holding them accountable for their behavior, but that really, the bottom line was that I expected them to hold themselves accountable for their behavior. Why wait to be confronted by staff, or see their peers be confronted about negative behavior? Why not simply turn to their peers or to themselves and say "Hey man, don't be *that* guy!" Don't be that guy who goes to Concerns, rather than accepts the feedback and moves on. Don't be that guy who holds up the unit and makes everyone late to the Dining Hall. "Don't be *that* guy!"

I must give credit to DSS, Chris Ellison, but a good-natured remark about holding others, and most especially oneself, accountable for behaviors which have negative consequences attached, suddenly turned into a chorus being chanted back to me at full volume by the entire student population of Silver State Academy. That simple statement seemed to make clear to the students that control of one's behavior *is* a choice. It is a personal resolution—a personal expression of intention which leads to the solution of a problem.

When the time arrives for me to declare my own resolutions for the coming year, it will be hard not to smile. The melodies of the holiday season may be fading from my mind, but the powerful message that came from a lighthearted moment with the students will forever ring in my ears. How many problems of my own might be solved if I simply choose to remember 200 students chanting at me "Don't be *that* guy!" and remember that lasting change truly comes from within. With that said, let it begin with me.

Happy Holidays and Best Wishes in the New Year!

## Construction Trades Program Gets Remodeled

Posted in September, the 2007 American Community Survey showed that there were more than 11 million construction workers in the U.S. which equated to an estimated 7.7 percent of the total civilian workforce aged 16 years or older. Silver State Academy's construction trades program is working toward bolstering those numbers by improving the workplace readiness and marketability of its students. This summer, the program's teacher, Harold Whalin, added new elements to the program with the idea that students will benefit from projects that simulate the kinds of tasks and skills that are found at real construction sites.



The new elements focus on situations found in residential construction or remodeling jobs. Students will build a full-scale model of a two-room addition and cover all aspects of the project from framing to finish work. For several years, the program has taught some of these elements in such projects as building storage sheds for public sale, but the students' training covered basic skills like framing,

siding, roofing, setting doors, and general finish work. Now they'll learn complex skills such as electrical work, plumbing, and intricate finishing techniques. In addition to undertaking the building phase of the project, students will learn to recycle by dismantling the structures and then passing those materials on to new students entering the program.

Employment in the construction field has a proven record of dependability and long term sustainability; *staying power* if you will. By incorporating the advanced training into the construction program, Mr. Whalin is directly supporting the fundamental goal of all Career and Technical Education programs at Silver State Academy which is to prepare students for the work place and give them skills to secure higher paying jobs. His students will undoubtedly receive an increased sense of realism in their learning experience making them a greater asset to the work force and the community as a whole.

## ROP Awarded Mayor's Cup

*Aliens have landed at the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository and are feeding off the waste! John Wayne & the Q House Associates have been called upon to neutralize the Alien threat. After a blazing gun fight, John Wayne and his Associates decimate the attacking aliens and dispatch the Magna Alien.*

On November 1st, that scene played out six times along the Nevada Day Parade route under overcast skies and drizzling rain. This year's Parade theme was *Hollywood in Nevada—Movies and Television* and celebrated one hundred and eleven years of making movies in Nevada. Rite of Passage entered a float that was loosely based on the feature film, *The Shootist*, filmed in Carson City (1976), starring John Wayne.

The 2008 version of the film, scripted by Mike Reynolds' (Q House Science Teacher), featured multiple Rite of Passage staff and students. Q House student athletes

either played combat aliens trying to kill John Wayne, or "walker" aliens that were handing out nuclear waste (candy) to kids in the crowd. Whether the students played alien invaders or acted as support personnel, they all were involved in the float's construction under the guidance of Mr. Reynolds.

The Q House float was one of over 200 entries to participate in the parade and at the end of the day, when the votes were counted, not only did Rite of Passage walk away with first place in the youth division, it also was awarded the Mayor's cup (2<sup>nd</sup> place overall).



# Community & Customer News

## Companionship along “America’s Loneliest Road”

Rite of Passage students participated in the September 17<sup>th</sup> Annual OATBRAN Event. “They ate oat bran cereal” you ask? No! OATBRAN is One Awesome Tour Bike Ride Across Nevada, and Rite of Passage students broke the boundaries of mediocrity by participating in this event. Curtis Fong, race coordinator and *Bike The West* director, said the OATBRAN “is a fully supported, multi-day, motel style, bike ride across the Silver State following the legendary Pony Express Trail on U.S. Highway 50, *America’s Loneliest Road*.”

Many Rite of Passage students have tremendous athletic prowess but it’s rarely cultivated prior to coming to the ROP program. Oftentimes, there’s a discrepancy between what the students *think* they can do and what they actually *can* do. Students participate in a relatively short training regimen and the transformations are incredible. “I never



thought in a million years I’d be one of those guys wearing tight shorts on the side of the road, but then I came to ROP and was challenged to ride a bike 70 miles around Lake Tahoe. A month later, I was asked to ride 420 miles across Nevada—now that was a challenge!” said student Mario V.

Students also provided support for all the participants. “Not only did we ride our bikes 420 miles...we also helped feed an entire crew of cyclists and support staff, totaling 50 people,” said student James A. ROP students interacted with, and were inspired by, people from all over the country. Victor S., another student who rode the distance, commented, “Some doctors, lawyers, and computer programmers came from across the United States to ride... and I knew all of them on a first name basis by the time we were done.”



Despite the trials and tribulations experienced along the way, including fatigue and riding through pouring rain, each rider learned to depend on one another. “This is where the ROP students shined; they provided unconditional support for everyone,” said Coach Williams. For years, Rite of Passage has been called upon to assist with all aspects of *Bike The West’s* cycling events. Every time, each student gets to help people pursue a passion, and each student comes away with an experience that forever will be woven into his life story.

## SSA Students Drive Numbers of First Tee’s Program

Between April and September, SSA participated four times per week with the First Tee Golf Program. The program is an initiative of the World Golf



Foundation and its mission is “to impact the lives of young people by providing learning facilities and educational programs that promote character development and life-enhancing values through the game of golf.” The Program’s *Nine Core Values*—honesty, integrity, sportsmanship, respect, confidence, responsibility, perseverance, courtesy, and judgment—“represent some of the many inherently positive values connected with the game of golf.”

SSA students helped the younger First Tee students not only with their golf skills (like how to hold and swing the golf club) but also with their life skills—SSA students shared life

experiences with First Tee students. “Many people don’t know about Rite of Passage,” said Case Manager Ken Crowley, and “...this allowed the community to see our students interacting with others.”

The clinics were held at Wolf Run, North Run, Washoe Golf Club, and Arrow Creek and, by the end of the program, all 12 SSA students were certified at the “par” or “birdie level” of play. “It was an incredible experience for the students,” said CM Crowley, “they got a chance to learn a game that they can play the rest of their life, while also working on their treatment issues.”

Student Justin W. said, “I plan on keeping up with the program. I would love to keep teaching and playing golf.” Perhaps he

will—Dutch Schulz, the SSA golf coach, said, “Next golf season, SSA will have a complete team assembled (six junior varsity and six varsity students), and will compete in the Nevada 2A conference that begins on the last day of February and lasts until May, when the State Tournament happens. This past season, we had two students who were within one stroke of making it to the State Tournament which was amazing, because neither of them had more than five weeks of training under their belt.”





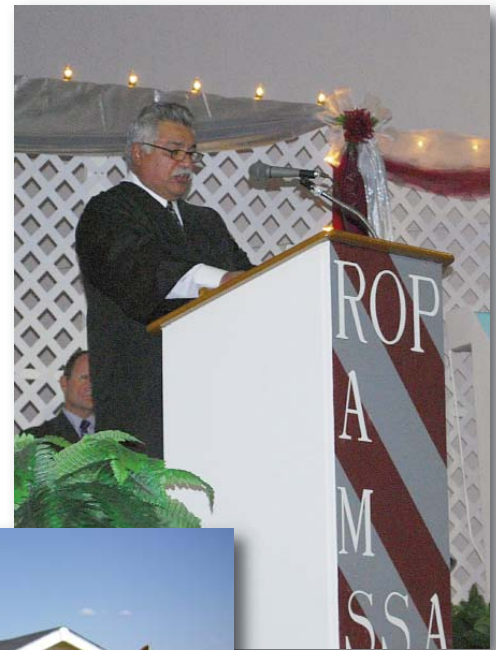
# Ram-Page

## 7th Annual RAM Bowl

Award Presented to Silver State Academy, winner of this year's game.



SSA Football Coach Jerry Grimshaw has a word with his team.



## All Rise

The honorable Judge Juan Ulloa spoke at SSA's fall graduation ceremony.



## Take Me To Your Leader

Q House Science Teacher, Mike Reynolds, as the Magna Alien during the Nevada Day Parade.



## Howdy Partner

SSA students in the 4H program learn many aspects of equine training, including horseback riding.



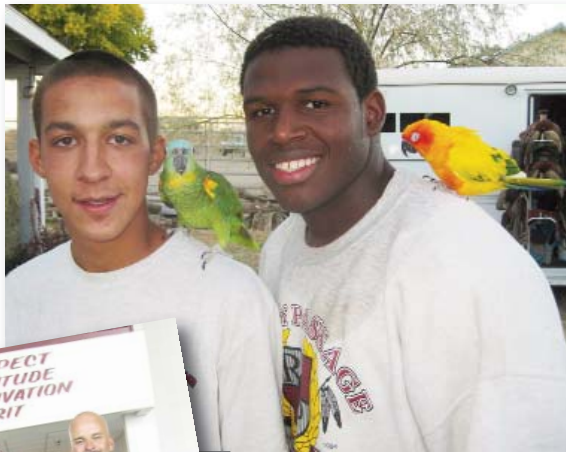
The Cross Country Team, a combination of SSA and Minden Q House students, placed 7th in the Northern Regional meet at Rancho San Rafael in Reno.



Tracy Reece, Division Director I from San Bernardino, and Shawn Lenahan, So. California ROP Admissions, attend SSA's fall graduation ceremony.

**Polly Want A Cracker?**

Students take a break from stacking alfalfa at a local residence to say hi to "Harli" & "Roxy."



**Thank You For All Your Service**

Ski Broman and Lawrence Howell bid farewell to James Lutu.



**Up, Up, and Away**

Rite of Passage's awesome aerial offense left its defenders paralyzed during the 2008 season.

Why do we do what we do? We do what we do because we want to improve the lives of youth—it's our mission. To guide Rite of Passage in its mission, it uses evidence-based practices and a cognitive-based curriculum. When a curriculum is developed for at-risk youth, the course of study also needs to be dynamic and flexible in order to address the student's specific needs and learning styles. Research indicates that program success happens when "offenders do something about their difficulties rather than just talk about them. These types of [behavioral] interventions teach offenders new, pro-social skills... through modeling, practice, increasing difficulty of the skill, and reinforcement." (Latessa & Lowenkamp, 2006)

Rite of Passage provides its students with an action-oriented, cognitive-based curriculum designed to guide them toward a healthy reintegration into the community. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is evidence-based, which means that it's supported by research proving its efficacy in helping people make emotional and behavioral changes. Rite of Passage uses several evidence-based curriculums that support its students' therapeutic needs such as *Thinking for a Change*, *Active Parenting*, and *Aggression Replacement Training*.

Rite of Passage recently published, for all of its sites, the first installments of its curriculum, or RAMS manual... an acronym for Respect, Attitude, Motivation, and Spirit. It's an eight-volume (referred to as *concepts*), structured guideline that teaches students to be good citizens and functioning members not only on their school campus but in the general community as well. This article will look closely at the first four concepts which are titled *Understanding How Systems & Organizations Work*; *Creating The Future You Want*; *Using Your Strengths & Developing Resiliency*; and *Understanding How Our Internal World Affects Us*.

**Concept 1: Understanding How Systems and Organizations Work.** Business organizations aren't only made up of people—they also have methods, procedures, routines, techniques, structure, and practices to keep everything organized. In Concept 1, students are shown that these elements exist not only at Rite of Passage but in other organizations as well. Comparisons are drawn by teaching and having the students learn fundamentals such as norms and rules (unwritten rules of conduct and formal

directives); guided group meetings and team meetings (business or committee meetings); and student evaluations through force field analysis (employee/performance evaluations). Once the students recognize, understand, and put into practice the parallels between Rite of Passage and other organizations, they're better able to effectively participate in school, jobs, or community groups when they exit the program.

**Concept 2: Creating the Future You Want.** What does the future hold for us? It's an all-important question and it's difficult to foresee exactly what it holds, but, we can be the creator of our future.

We all have ambitions, aspirations, goals, and objectives. In order to accomplish these goals, regardless of size, Rite of Passage students are taught to use a definitive problem-solving system adopted from *Thinking for a Change*. The system asks the student to: stop and think; give a description to the problem; gather information to set a goal; understand what their choices are and then, the consequences of those choices; choose, plan, and do; and finally, evaluate. Whether the student works on a school project, lays out a career path, or has to deal with unwelcome news from home, they learn that this six-step problem solving system is universal.

Concept 2 also discusses surrounding one's self with people whom we admire and who inspire us. These people are *role models*—they can help in creating the future we want. Rite of Passage has many role models who encourage and succeed in involving the students with outside organizations, community events, and participation in *doing for others*. In the process, students are exposed to positive community role models who can help them along their path to success.

**Concept 3: Using Your Strengths and Developing Resiliency.** There are many words to describe *resiliency*, such as flexible, tough, strong, or being able to "bounce back." In Concept 3, students learn to become resilient by using their strengths. Rite of Passage believes that every student has unique strengths and character traits they can utilize to achieve their goals and overcome challenges. The curriculum at Rite of Passage teaches students to find and improve upon their strengths and positive character traits and, at the same time, develop resiliency so that challenges or failures won't prevent them from persevering in whatever endeavor they embrace. First, we identify or do an assessment, and then, there's time for self-reflection. The assessment used is the Positive

Achievement Change Tool (PACT) that identifies not only the student's *risk factors*, such as substance use, aggression, or living conditions, but also their *protective factors*, such as school status, current relationships, or employment. In her 1992 definitive follow-up study of resilient, challenged youth, Emmy Werner provides evidence showing "that risk factors are not as powerful as protective factors in predicting adult outcomes—even for extremely challenged young people."

**Concept 4: Understanding How Our Internal World Influences Us.** There is no question that each of us, on a daily basis, is influenced by our internal "world." Happiness is not dependent on anyone else's approval. At Rite of Passage, each student is taught that internal thoughts, feelings, and attitudes control how we act—not external stimulus like people, places, or events. In the process of changing the student's beliefs about the power of thought, the student can identify the thinking errors and the triggers that cause them to consider negative behavior. The bottom line is that triggers always are internal. They're thoughts in our head—people, places, and events that surround us, but actually have no meaning until we assign them meaning.

The curriculum focuses on how to deal with and overcome thinking errors and behavioral problems—such as anti-social peer association, anti-social personality traits, substance abuse, lack of problem-solving and self-control skills, and other factors "that are highly correlated with criminal conduct, i.e., criminogenic factors" (Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2006). To help students discern their triggers, Concept 4 re-introduces the "Six Problem Solving Steps," applying them to fictional characters in hypothetical situations. The stories illustrate how the characters might rethink their choices for a more favorable outcome.

Rite of Passage has been "improving the lives of youth" for the past 25 years. The new RAMS Manual supports this mission by providing a clear, definitive path for its students to walk.

## Works Cited

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# Staff Update

## Employee

### Steffen Bryant

Steffen is originally from Savannah, Georgia, and after high school, he declined three basketball scholarships to join the Navy. Between 1997 and 1999, he worked for Rite of Passage but decided to leave and run his own Group Home. Steffen wanted a more flexible schedule so that he could spend more time with his son—he had missed his son's first steps. However, in 2006 Steffen returned to Rite of Passage and was quickly promoted to Group Leader; and this year Steffen was promoted to Unit Manager.



## Spotlight

### Unit Manager

Steffen and his wife, Dellare, were married in 1999 and they have a son, Phoenyx. Steffen loves helping his son during karate class and during the time he's been at Silver State Academy, he's participated in many Basketball Ball Leagues, and played in 4 Championship Leagues. His favorite thing about ROP is making a difference in students' lives and seeing them go on to be productive citizens.

## EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH



### August

**Linda McCarty (Ancillary Services Supervisor)**- Linda is the Ancillary Services Supervisor and has been with ROP for 14 years. She's from Napa Valley, CA, has been married for 12 years, has four children, and a beautiful new granddaughter named Mya. She loves camping and spending time with her family as well as watching Raiders games. When Linda and her fifteen year old son go to Twin Lakes, she says "we chase after the bears and we never have a problem finding them."



### August

**Jerome Washington (Coach)**- Jerome is from Las Vegas, a graduate of Sparks High School, and currently is studying Sociology at UNR. He has five sisters, one brother, and two daughters. He loves spending time with his family, barbecuing, and racing motor cycles. Jerome joined the Army in 2001 and did two tours in Iraq. He was discharged in 2007 due to a combat injury. He says he "came from a troubled youth and can relate to students. I really enjoy seeing them succeed." Jerome's peers always comment on his great smile and positive attitude.



### September

**Guadalupe Madera (Ancillary Services)**- Guadalupe is from Huejuquilla, Jalisco, Mexico, and has been working in the Ancillary Services as a kitchen helper for nine years. She's currently taking English classes through Yerington Adult Education and on May 24th, 2008, she became a United States Citizen. She's been married for 27 years and has five children, as well as two grandchildren. She loves dancing, cooking, and a good joke. She says she likes to smile at everyone because they always smile back. Her favorite things about ROP are being able to help students and work with great people.



### September

**William Granger (Group Leader)**-William is said to be a modest person, but his peers consistently say that he's a quality Group Leader. One of his co-workers has even seen High School films of him playing football and said that he was the star running back. He's been working at ROP for over five years and says that his reason for being here is to help the students. He's been married for five years and has two sons ages four and six. He likes playing video games and draws his own comic books for fun. William says that he's "able to dunk a basketball and this surprises people due to my height."



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*Hi Larry Woodford [Western Region Admissions Manager],*

*First and foremost, I would like to thank Rite of Passage for the guidance and the care that you have given my son, Andrew. I could go on and on about Andrew and the life he was leading, but we all are too familiar with it. I believe that Andrew was a great kid in a lost body. He needed some structure and my husband and I came into Andrew's life a bit too late. There were only two places Andrew was heading for and that was jail or death. I believe 100% that if you would not have helped him see the man that he was underneath his skin, Andrew would have been lost. I am very proud of my son and who he has become today. Now, it's my time to sit back and let him shine. I believe he will have no problem achieving, as he always has, with ROP and his family on his side. Thank you for bringing my son, Andrew, back to me. I am very grateful to you and Rite of Passage; major kudos to you and your program. It's a life changing experience for the child as well as the family.*

*Again, thank you so very much for everything. We (my husband and I) will always be your two biggest fans and believers in the program. Thanks Larry.*

*-From the parents of Andrew*