

## **6th graders learn about being green at Planet Party**

By Rose Albano-Risso

Manteca Bulletin, Tues., March 26, 2013

There will be one group of sixth graders that will not be riding the school bus to the annual Planet Party on Thursday, April 4, at the Manteca Unified Office campus.

The students, along with their teachers, will be walking from Stella Brockman Elementary School in the Villa Ticino subdivision off South Airport Way to the event site just a few minutes on foot away. In the process, they will be learning about how walking helps reduce air pollution.

Some 2,000 sixth graders throughout Manteca Unified will be learning about how to become better stewards of their environment by taking part in 15-minute interactive presentations on various topics such as clean air, impacts of commuting, renewable energy, recycling, and water conservation among many others.

Topics on how to keep the air clean for present and future generations will be featured by event sponsors such as Valley Clean Air Now, Commute Connection, and South San Joaquin Irrigation District.

Conservation and agricultural presentations will be given by J.R. Simplot, the Micke Grove Zoo, California Waterfowl, and the California Department of Fish and Game, among others. PG&E, SSJID and other businesses will have displays and information about energy. The students will learn about recycling in the display booths of Epic Plastics, Onsite Electronics, Owen-Illinois, and other businesses. Teaching the students about the latest green innovations will be such business participants as Ricoh, Shred-It, and the San Joaquin County Public Works. Water conservation and other hydrologic issues will be presented in the booths of the cities of Lathrop and Manteca, SSJID, and MCR Engineering.

The major sponsors of Planet every year are Frito Lay, PG&E, Gen 7/American Modular Systems, CBC Steel, Allied Waste Services and Valley CAN.

The sixth-graders from the various schools will be arriving at intervals at the Planet Party site which is the grounds of the Manteca Unified district offices on the northwest corner of Airport Way and Louise Avenue. Planet Party co-chairpersons are Victoria Brunn and Patty Page.

## **In search of a safer route to school**

### **Worldwide movement gets local, with goal of getting kids to walk, bike to school, improving infrastructure**

By Michelle Breier

San Diego Union-Tribune, Mon., March 25, 2013

ESCONDIDO — For most families with school-age children, walking or riding a bike to school is unheard of.

Today, fewer than 15 percent of children who live within a couple of miles of their school walk or bike, according to federal transportation statistics. The decline coincides with a rise in childhood obesity and poor air quality around schools, experts say.

But even if walking or biking is unrealistic for some, health, safety and education professionals want to make the routine of getting to and from school safer for everyone — children, parents, motorists and teachers.

That's the goal of "Safe Routes to Schools," a worldwide movement designed to increase the number of children who walk or ride a bike to school, while addressing health and environmental issues such as air pollution and traffic congestion. In the United States, federal and state Safe Routes programs provide funding for education and infrastructure improvements, such as sidewalks or pedestrian traffic signals.

Nowadays, the streets around a school on mornings and afternoons can look like an L.A. freeway, with cars idling in a blocks-long line. Children who do walk might be hiking along an

unpaved shoulder and squeezing precariously between cars. Safe Routes supporters aim to change that.

Increasing safety around schools to encourage walking or biking was the subject of a recent forum, where participants learned about making changes in myriad ways, from simple and grass-roots to large-scale collaborations, whether it's organizing walking groups or working with officials to improve roads.

The San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency brought national public health, planning and transportation expert Mark Fenton to Escondido 3-13 to conduct a Safe Routes training forum for about 60 people from around North County and beyond, including educators, PTA members, representatives of public health agencies, and city planners

The Escondido Union School District will receive a state "Paving the Way to Safe Routes to School Grant" to support that mission through education and outreach. The district's CARE Youth Project, a collaboration that works for a "safer and healthier Escondido," applied for the \$375,000 grant in October and is awaiting the funds.

CARE Youth Project Director Kimberly Israel said Safe Routes work starts with school-based discussion about what needs to be done to create safe surroundings, whether it's adding crossing guards or traffic-safety education.

"As we've been out at school sites, we've noticed kids are actually pretty good at following rules," Israel said. "It's the community that's running red lights. The conversation's starting in schools. But the reality is, they're community issues."

Fenton, who is unapologetically passionate about walkability and public health, started his visit at Mission Middle School to observe morning drop-off.

He buzzed around taking photos of the scene on busy, narrow Mission Avenue, as children darted across the roadway from nearby apartments, cars stacked up in two lines into the small driveway, and a crossing guard routinely faced cars ignoring a "no left turn" sign out of the school lot.

"The worst thing we can do is make pickup and drop-off faster and more convenient for cars," Fenton told the dozen or so observers with him. "We really have to think about convenience versus safety."

Safe Routes supporters may have to tackle the car-centric mindset of many parents, however.

Fenton's two-hour presentation at the training forum focused on why the Safe Routes premise centers on what's best for kids, not adults.

"Why am I such a lunatic about this? This is the first generation in American society that's going to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents," Fenton said. "That is completely unacceptable."

Healthy children also means better academic performance and classroom behavior, he added.

Distance is the No. 1 reason given for not walking to school, Fenton said. Locally, children may attend outside their neighborhood under a transfer, parents might opt for a charter school across town, or teens might attend a high school because of a special program.

Traffic concerns are a close second reason that parents give for driving to school, and it's "parents worried about traffic creating the traffic," Fenton said.

Some solutions are big and long-term, such as traffic signals, sidewalk improvements, or additional crosswalks. But costly solutions aren't the only answer, he said, encouraging community members to look around and start small.

One Safe Routes concept that Fenton urged people to consider was "remote alternative parking." With remote parking, parents and bus drivers would use a space a short distance from school, like a nearby park or church parking lot.

Fenton told of a success story in a Missouri town that not only solved traffic congestion, it reinvigorated the park that students walked through to reach school. Students were noticeably better behaved after a brisk 10-minute walk, and the chaos of drop-off was eliminated.

The Safe Routes forum sent participants back to their cities and schools with tangible ideas.

“We really (wanted) to get them to the point where they have a couple of things to take away and get going and ... to have a really good understanding of what Safe Routes is, how to look for funding,” said Jenel Lem, a community health promotions specialist with the county.

Sam Hasenin, a Vista traffic engineer, said the city is working on a comprehensive approach to Safe Routes. “This begins with reaching out to the community and understanding their needs through engaging them in activities that encourage walking and biking,” he said.

### **To learn more**

National Center for Safe Routes to School: [saferoutesinfo.org](http://saferoutesinfo.org)

Safe Routes to School National Partnership: [saferoutespartnership.org](http://saferoutespartnership.org)

Federal Highway Administration Safety Program: [safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/saferoutes/)

Caltrans Division of Local Assistance: [bit.ly/fP4xHF](http://bit.ly/fP4xHF)

Safe Routes to School California: [saferoutescalifornia.wordpress.com](http://saferoutescalifornia.wordpress.com)

Mark Fenton: [markfenton.com](http://markfenton.com)

CARE Youth Project: [careyouth.org](http://careyouth.org)

### **Despite strides, most US kids still breathe bad air**

From the Associated Press

In the Lodi News Sentinel, Tues., March 26, 2013

While there has been some progress in reducing U.S. air pollution in recent years, as recently as 2010, two-thirds of American children lived in counties where at least some pollutants exceeded federal standards.

Pollutants such as ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and particulate matter can cause respiratory problems and exacerbate asthma in children. Asthma cases have been rising for years, with more than 10 million children diagnosed in 2010.

Authorities say children are more vulnerable to air pollution because their lungs are still developing, and they eat, drink and breathe more in proportion to their body size.