

Student efforts focus on eye care clinic



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

By Ruth Longoria Kingsland
of the Daily Courier

MERLIN — About 150 people from low income families received free eye exams and will receive free prescription glasses through an event that was held Saturday at North Valley High School.

Saturday's clinic marked the first time North Valley High School's chapter of Future Business Leaders of America had taken the lead on the project. Also, this is the first year the school has had an FBLA, according to Deborah Acosta, an NVHS teacher and FBLA adviser.

Saturday's clinic was the third such event in Josephine County in as many years — all coordinated by the Josephine County Foundation, a nonprofit organization established by the Hidden Valley High School chapter of Future Business Leaders of America. The foundation includes students from all four public high schools in Josephine County, as well as from New Hope Christian School.

"The kids have taken the lead and are handling everything," Acosta said Saturday, as she walked around the school's gym, where hundreds of participants moved from station to station, getting blood pressure or blood sugar checked by student volunteers, as well as receiving eye exams.

Dozens of students from North Valley, Hidden Valley, Illinois Valley, and Grants Pass high schools and from Fleming Middle School, took part in the event, many learning new skills in the process.

North Valley's FBLA President Nicole Wee, a senior, and her protegee, Ha'aheo Ordonez, a junior, planned the eye clinic. Prior to the event, Ordonez and Wee spent time with Medford optometrist Kurt Wilkening, learning to use an auto refractor to measure the lenses on each patient's eyes.

"Your iris is like a lens, and your pupil interprets the message to adjust that lens to light," explained Ordonez, who plans to pursue a career in the medical radiology field after high school.

Wilkening and his associate, Tess Johnston, offered their services free of charge Saturday, as they have at past clinics involving the Josephine County Foundation. Wilkening's daughter, Cedar, a graduate of HVHS, was one of the founding members of the Josephine County Foundation.

Grants Pass resident, Pramila Stevens, 47, and her son, Kerin Sahrma, 25, said they were grateful for the opportunity to get their eyes checked at Saturday's event because neither of them has vision care

insurance, though both are working. Stevens works for Head Start and Sahrma is a video editor.

"I was really excited to find out about the clinic, because I work at a computer six hours a day and use my eyes a lot," Sahrma said.

Vicki Porter, 60, of Grants Pass, stopped at one of the eye care stations to thank students for their volunteer work.



PORTER

"This means so much to me because I have tried so hard to save money for glasses, but I'm on a fixed income and I'm disabled, and my Medicare doesn't pay for vision or dental anymore," Porter said. "I'm legally blind, and with my eye problems it would cost me about \$100 just for the exam and then several hundred more for glasses."

Participants were allowed to pick out their new glasses' frames during the event and will receive a call in the next few weeks to pick up their glasses.

The event was funded by a grant from the Carpenter Foundation, a Medford-based family organization that provides funding for educational and human service projects in the Rogue Valley.

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Gary Dolan is checked by Tessa Johnston, an Eyecare Associate optometrist. "This allows us to have specific lenses made for the person," Johnston said. For a gallery of photos, see www.thedailycourier.com.