

RAGE time

Harrison students eat lunch, talk community service in club

This marks another installment of Today's Lesson, an occasional series that chronicles classroom activities in Farmington Public Schools.

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Just three days after their backwards "Morp" prom drew rave reviews with classmates and faculty, members of Harrison High School's RAGE student club were treating it like old news.

That's nothing derogatory, mind you. It was just time to move on to the next thing for the socially minded lunch-hour club, which meets and eats every Monday with advisor Tim Russell.

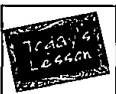
During a hectic session in which club members still manage to get in their lunch and conversation, they also swap dialogue with Russell as they talk about:

■ Setting up a parking lot pep rally for the Harrison marching band, which was traveling that week to Indiana for a tournament.

■ Doling out responsibilities and tasks in order to organize a week of January events to commemorate the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr.

■ Working out assignments

They're in: Students Heather Irvin and John Cooper are members of the club.



RAGE on: Harrison teacher Tim Russell moderates a recent lunch-hour session of RAGE.

for a district-wide community service telethon, slated for February.

■ Deciding who should lead the

charge in helping plan future dances such as the "Morp," which was co-organized with Students Against Drunk Driving as a laid-back link. Designed to be the opposite of a prom, kids and teachers wore casual dress and ate ordinary food. More importantly, about \$760 was raised for the Deaf, Hearing and Sign Language Center of Detroit.

Another topic was a holiday community service project, the Salvation Army Adopt-a-Family program.

"How many of you are interested in shopping for a family? Get some names," said Russell,

a teacher with a perfect personality for RAGE. He is communicative, flexible and able to give and receive information in a very informal setting. Most importantly, he is able to command respect from the teens while still allowing them plenty of latitude.

Russell has led the club since it was organized in September 1997. Each year, it has enjoyed rapid growth in both numbers and popularity. Only six members comprised RAGE (which got its name from the phrase "rage against the dying of the light") the first year; 30 members joined in 1998-99; this time around, there are 80 students in the

club. Thirty parents also are helping the kids with various endeavors.

During the meeting's "multicultural report" segment, Russell and students talked about the King week. A skit about peaceful resolution of student conflicts apparently will be part of the program.

"Now listen," said Russell, upping the vocal volume. "Prior to that week, we'll have someone come in from outside to teach you how to resolve conflicts. (That person) will instruct you. ... And then you'll role-play and present it to the other students."

"The issue last year was why



Capturing the moment: Dave Kinchen videotapes the lunch-hour meeting.

didn't we do something for it (King's birthday). We're changing that this year. Start planning. We're going to make that week grand."

Next, Russell emphasized the need for students to help with the tailgate send-off for the marching band.

When the room got too noisy for him to hear his own words, however, Russell waved his arms.

"Nowhere did I hold up a sign that said 'Chon.'"

Quickly, order was returned and business resumed.

"We sometimes get caught up in (backing) the same groups," Russell continued. "It's easier to support the football team. But we're going to show our support (for the band)."

"I need somebody to put this together. Who is going to do it?" When responses weren't coming fast enough to suit Russell, he made a comment that would make Dale Carnegie smile.

"You know I love the energy," Russell said. "But we have to get this done."

RAGE catching on

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RAGE isn't just about raising awareness about social issues. There's plenty of time for fun. Some events include bowling, staff-student volleyball and soccer matches, flag football and a "hayrideless hayride."

During fast-paced, brown-bag lunch hour meetings, RAGE club members and their advisor help plan those fun times.

Of course, since it was formed in September 1997, the club has spent plenty of energy focusing on issue-oriented activities. Those have included poetry and mural contests designed to celebrate diversity, campus beautification and "RAGE-ing Against Cliques," an after-school discussion group which delved into how cliques are destructive to school unity.

Founding club advisor and Harrison faculty member Tim Russell and others recently talked about why they think the club is catching on.

"It's tapped into a need. I feel the students have to have a connection," Russell said. "So, through a (combination of) community service, social activities, multi-cultural activities ... it just seems to be something they flock to."

Russell, whose T-shirt included the inscription "rage against the dying of the light," words from a poem written by Dylan Thomas, said the club helps stoke the inner fires in teens and enables them to "seize the day."

One factor is perspective. For example, Russell tries to help the students succeed for the right reasons. That means focusing on learning instead of achieving a particular letter grade, or deciding the reason they do community service is to help those in need - and not because it would look good on a student transcript.

Harrison Assistant Principal Dennis Noe assisted in during a recent RAGE meeting and couldn't help but feel good



Club getting noticed: Ed Cleland, president of the RAGE club, said the benefits of joining the group are starting to become known among students.

about what he saw and heard. "The enthusiasm of the group is really something to watch," Noe said. "... You give some of the responsibility to students and they'll take it and run with it."

One such example was sophomore Mindy Marks, who quickly responded after Russell asked for volunteers to plan upcoming club-sponsored student dances. Mindy helped organize the recent "Morp" (backwards, hence an informal prom) and said she'd like to put together a luau-themed dance.

Such dances, she explained, "get people more into RAGE, and they get some to join. ... I think it (RAGE) is a really good idea."

After the meeting, president Ed Cleland, a senior, talked about why RAGE is becoming the rage at the Farmington district school.

"The reason it's growing so strongly is people see what we're doing for the school and other individuals," Cleland said. "People are jumping on the bandwagon. ... RAGE gives us an opportunity to do charity work and have a great time, too."

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