



Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler

Senior project hopes to open eyes

I never had a senior project in high school; I guess I count myself lucky on that much. I had my share of required volunteer time in both high school and college, but didn't care much for it most of the time. I've always left the choice to volunteer or do something that serves the community up to the heart – that twinge inside you that tells you it's the right thing to do.

For high school senior Yeta Berisha, that feeling made her immediately confident in her choice for her project.

"I have always wanted to help somehow with sex trafficking, and

this is a step toward helping and making a difference," Berisha said. "I knew I wanted to do something to raise money for this cause and the idea of the project just came to me."

Berisha will host a benefit for the organization Courage to Be You on Thursday at the Sonora Opera Hall. The event, which starts at 6 p.m., will include live music and auctions, with the profits going to Courage to Be You, which Berisha said provides a safe place for girls who are victims of sexual exploitation. Kim Bordisso, who Berisha said has seen sex trafficking first hand, will also speak.

Tickets, sold at the door, are \$7 and food and drinks will be sold.

According to Berisha, there are 200,000 traffickers in the United States and one out of three girls

who run away to live on the streets are approached by traffickers within 48 hours.

"People need to know that this tragedy is happening all around them," Berisha said. "We pass by victims every day. People think it's something that they do not need to worry about, but the truth is, it could happen to them or someone close to them."

Berisha believes the cause plays a large role in what she was "made to do."

"From the first time I ever heard about this, I knew I needed to do something," she said. "I want to be a psychiatrist someday and help the saved victims, but I think that this is a first step. It is something that is being ignored by many, and it can't be ignored anymore because it is happening more and more. The numbers continue to increase, and

today it is worse than ever."

While she hopes the event will raise a large amount of money, Berisha's main goal for the event is to raise awareness.

"I didn't put a limit on the amount we make, I'm just praying and asking God to help us raise the amount he believes is the amount needed. I hope to not only raise money to help toward this cause,

but to open the eyes of our society and teach them the seriousness of sex trafficking and hopefully make an impact on them to where they will want to make a difference as well."

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at hwheeler@sierralodestar.com and mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.

Courage to Be You Concert

WHEN: 6 p.m. Thursday

WHERE: Sonora Opera Hall, 250 S. Washington St., Sonora

TICKETS: \$7 at the door

The rodeo rides into town this weekend

Yippee yi o, it's rodeo!

In fact, it's the 61st annual Oakdale PRCA Rodeo. Presented by the Oakdale Saddle Club, this rodeo is always held the second weekend in April – rain or shine. The 2012 event arrives in town this weekend, the first of the year's events on the PRCA circuit.

Of course, there are many events in Oakdale in the week prior that lead up to an exciting rodeo weekend for the participants and fans

alike. I'll be sharing some with you from the Cowboy Capitol.

Oakdale is rich with cowboy culture and history and much of the town embraces this popular sport and the beloved rodeo that has been sponsored and promoted by the Oakdale Saddle Club for 61 years at the arena grounds on East F St. (Highways 108 and 120). Along with the saddle club, the Oakdale Cowboy Museum board of directors and staff, Christie Camarillo and Karen Serpa have done a wonderful job preserving and promoting the area's cowboy culture.

Rodeos offer strong connections and windows to our past. Fewer than 100 years ago, American society was still an agrarian one. Farms and ranches dotted the landscape; young people grew up with strong connections to the land, livestock and horses. Young men (primarily) wrangled cattle across the country, honing the cowboy skills of ridin', ropin', brandin', doctorin', herdin' and bronc bustin', to name a few.

As society changed, mechanization took over the ranch; big stock trucks and trailers replaced dusty cattle drives on trails, big city life called and country dwellers dwindled. Working cowboys came close to becoming an endangered species. But the country still sported a large number of ranches, and cattle and horse people in all parts of the country traditionally have assisted each other with working their cattle – round-ups, brandings and the like – which offered cowboys opportunities to organize informal competitions among themselves.

Out of these informal contests came the birth of professional rodeo. In 1945, the RCA, or Rodeo Cowboys Association, was organized. Later, in the 1950s, the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association was formed. This offered the rules to standardize rodeo events and to protect the participants and animals. It also drew local and national sponsorships, which helped organizers produce entertaining, professional events and allowed for sweeter prize pots for competitors.

From working ranch competitions, rodeo has grown

to be a huge, national sport with lots of prize money. Participants and the livestock earn points for the events in which they compete. Cowboys and cowgirls travel and compete in rodeos across the country and if they're good enough, they can make a living doing so. Some enter multiple events on a weekend.

Each season of rodeo competitions ends with the National Rodeo Finals in December in Las Vegas. The sport also celebrates its highest award winners by enshrining them into the Cowboy Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs, Colo. Oakdale has been home to a number of NFR cowboys and honored members of the Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Perhaps you've heard the name of Harley May: a tall, lanky Oakdale area rancher and cowboy in the late 1950s and '60s. May was a three-time NFR

S t e e r Wrestling Champion who was inducted into the

Oakdale Roundup

Melinda Owen



Hall of Fame in 1979.

Another Oakdale cowboy – one of the area's most famous – was young Ace Berry. Ace was just 15 years, 11 months old when he qualified in Team Roping for the NFR in 1962. Ace qualified for 14 consecutive

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