

JENNIFER CONNELLAN: Future Focused

## Summer School Online?



**T**hese days we do practically everything online—from shopping to socializing to ordering pizzas! It has become a normal way of existing. But what about having students take high school classes online? This is probably the first summer in which I've seen more students doing summer school online than in the traditional classroom! Is it a good thing or a bad thing? What are the pros and cons?

### Pros:

\* Students are able to work at their own pace. If they are struggling with a particular concept, they can slow down and work through it again and again until they understand it. Conversely, if a concept is easy for them, they can just speed through.

\* The scheduling is completely flexible. If a student works better at 8 p.m. than at 8 a.m., he can “go” to school then. If a family wants to take a vacation in July, they can basically bring the classroom with them. There are virtually no restrictions on where and when the coursework needs to be done.

\* The distractions that exist in a regular classroom are not present. There are no other students making noise, no announcements interrupting lectures, and no gaps in learning due to absence.

\* Courses can be completed more quickly. We just

had a student finish an entire year of Pre-Calculus in three weeks. In this way, online courses can be quite motivating—there is a direct incentive for working hard: Students finish faster.

### Cons:

\* It can be very difficult for students to be motivated enough to stay on track and work a certain number of hours per day when they are left on their own. The amount of self-discipline required in online courses is sometimes more than the amount of self-discipline high school students actually have. This is especially true for students who are taking online courses to remediate a class they failed last year. Imagine how difficult it would be to sit down by yourself and work through a class in which you did not understand the material or particularly like the class the first time!

\* There is no actual teacher to encourage students on a daily basis. Although most of the courses have a “teacher” who wrote the actual course, there is little to no interaction between the student and the teacher. Most often, the students merely submit the exams to the teacher and the only feedback they receive is a numerical score.

\* The Internet is very distracting for teenagers! Between Instant Messenger, MySpace and computer games, it is possibly more distracting than an actual

classroom full of thirty other students! It is difficult for students taking online courses to stay on task with their virtual worlds tempting them the whole time.

\* The method for getting a good grade can be manipulated, resulting in poor mastery of the actual subject. For example, many of the online courses include “checkpoint quizzes” or “speedbacks” in which students can simply hunt and search for the answers. The big exams are generally based on the questions asked in the quizzes, so the student's entire knowledge base of a subject is built upon memorized answers to quiz questions. This might result in a good grade but will leave the student with a shaky foundation as he moves on to the next level.

Clearly, there are both advantages and disadvantages to online courses. Much of it depends on the actual student, and many of the disadvantages are negated if a student works through the online course with an independent tutor. This way the student can still enjoy the flexibility online classes offer, but will also be motivated and held accountable by someone who will ensure he or she not only receives a good grade in the course, but also masters the subject matter.

*Jennifer Connellan is the co-founder and president of Future Focused, a tutoring, academic coaching and college counseling service for high school students, located in San Juan Capistrano. ■*

JAN SIEGEL: Moments In Time

## Capistrano Participates in 24-Hour Cancer Fight



**F**rom 10 a.m. on Saturday, July 28 until 10 a.m. on Sunday, July 29, the community of San Juan Capistrano will participate in the Cancer Society's Relay for Life. This event, like no other, shows how one person can make a difference.

Dr. Gordy Klatt, a Tacoma colorectal surgeon, wanted to generate more money for his local Cancer Society. He decided to personally raise money for the fight by doing something he enjoyed—running marathons.

In May 1985, Dr. Klatt spent 24 hours circling the track at Baker Stadium at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma for more than 83 miles. Throughout the night, friends paid \$35 to run or walk with him for 30 minutes. He raised \$27,000 to fight cancer. That first year, nearly 300 of Dr. Klatt's friends, family and patients watched as he ran and walked the course.

While he circled the track those 24 hours, he thought about how others could take part. He envisioned a 24-hour team relay event that could raise more money to fight cancer. Months later he pulled together a small committee to plan the first team relay event known as the City of Destiny Classic 24-Hour Run Against Cancer.

In 1986, 19 teams took part in the first team

relay event on the track at the Stadium Bowl and raised \$33,000. Now, 21 years later, more than 4,800 Relays nationwide mobilize communities to celebrate survivors, remember loved ones and raise money for the fight against cancer. Remember, cancer never sleeps.

Unfortunately, there is not one person who does not know someone who has had cancer. There are many ways to participate in this once a year event. You can join a team. In San Juan Capistrano nearly all the service groups in town including Rotary, the Boys and Girls Club, the Historical Society, Friends of the Library, as well as many homeowner associations are forming teams. Some families are creating teams. You can support members of a team. Don't forget Bill Ramsey, who runs for the city in memory of his brother-in-law. Will Ramsey surpass 100 miles this year? Come out on July 28-29 to cheer for him, your friends and your neighbors. Different teams will be selling food and items, with all the proceeds going to the Cancer Society. For further information you can log into the Relay for Life web site at [www.relayforlife.org](http://www.relayforlife.org).

The Cancer Society sponsors the purchase of luminaria bags. Highlighting the evening is the Ceremony of Hope which honors cancer survivors and remember loved ones lost to cancer. Each luminaria is a bag filled with sand and a small candle that makes it glow.

Each luminaria bears the name of a person who has battled cancer. Right before the Luminaria Ceremony, all the candles are lit. As they burn into the night they light the way for the walkers. The suggested donation for a luminaria is \$10. These can be purchased in advance or at the event on July 28.

And while we are on the subject of walking, do not forget the two walks in historic San Juan Capistrano: The Architectural Walking Tour, which is sponsored by the Friends of the Library on Saturdays at 10 a.m., starting at the train depot, and the Adobe Walking Tour, which is sponsored the Historical Society on Sundays at 1 p.m. starting at the train depot. Information on both of these tours can be accessed by going to the City's Web page at [www.sanjuancapistrano.org](http://www.sanjuancapistrano.org) and looking for the Things To Do list.

You can spend a Moment in Time remembering friends and loved ones during the Relay for Life. And you can spend a Moment in Time taking the two historical walks in town and remembering life like is used to be and still is today.

(An apology about the Flags that I wrote about last time. The flags at the Mission have been taken down for cleaning.)

*Jan Siegel is a longtime downtown tour guide and member of the Cultural Heritage Commission. She was recently honored with the addition of her name to the city's "Wall of Distinction." ■*