

JENNIFER CONNELLAN: Future Focused

Back to School ... Make it a Great Year!



I have a feeling this new school year is going to be a good one. There seems to be a certain buzz of excitement and energy around San Juan Capistrano. September represents a new beginning—an opportunity for positive change, a chance to start again and correct mistakes from years past. Students have new school supplies, new teachers and even a new high school to attend this year!

How do you ensure that this positive momentum translates to a successful school year for your students? As parents, what can you do now to set your student up for success? How much involvement should you have?

Here are a few suggestions to help you start off well:

1. Establish your involvement early. Teachers want you to introduce yourself to them! A short, polite e-mail is perfect. Let them know that you are looking forward to having your student in their class and ask them what you can do at home to support their efforts. A brief description of your student's strengths and problem areas is also appreciated. For example, "Johnny is a strong math student, but he is often shy and has trouble participating in class discussions." Finally, for the subject line in the e-mail, put your student's name so that the teacher can reference it easily in the future.

2. Use the school Web sites and sign up for the ListServe. The school Web sites are the key sources of information now, especially for important dates and special schedules. For students who attend any of the

Capistrano Unified School District (CUSD) schools, the ListServe directory is a great way to stay on top of what is happening at school. To sign up, simply go to www.capousd.org and click on "School Info." On the drop-down menu, click on "ListServes." This will take you to a page where you can select your student's school and then enter your e-mail address. Once you register, you will receive e-mail bulletins about important happenings at the school. The combination of checking the school Web site often and using the ListServe will ensure that you stay up to date on all the news, schedules changes and special announcements at the school ...without having to depend on your student to relay the information!

3. Ask your son or daughter what goals they have this year. Although it is natural for you to have your own goals for them, try to simply listen to what they would like to accomplish. Most likely, the aspirations they have for themselves will be similar to what you want for them. The goals should be challenging, but realistic. Ask them what they think they need to do to achieve their goals, and ideally have them write down these action steps as well. Try to refrain from bringing up negative patterns that they've had in the past. This is truly an opportunity to begin again. Assume the best and reinforce how well you think they are going to do. Instead of emphasizing the outcome ("I know you can get an A in Spanish this year"), encourage the process and action steps behind the grade (for example, "I am so

proud of you for committing 20 minutes each night to studying vocabulary—I know it will pay off for you!") Reinforcing the effort rather than the performance will alleviate unnecessary pressure and ensure they learn how to go about achieving their goals in life, no matter what they are.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or comments about anything related to academics or college planning. This column is meant to be as interactive as possible, and I welcome your responses!

Jennifer Connellan is the co-founder and president of Future Focused, a San Juan business. Future Focused is the leader in academic services for students, offering tutoring, academic coaching, and college counseling programs for high school students. With two Master's degrees in psychology and years of experience dealing with adolescent issues, Jennifer is more than qualified to address your questions and concerns regarding your students. Reach her by e-mailing: Jennifer@futurefocused.com ■

MICHAEL CANTOR: Emergency Preparedness

Know What's Below



About a year ago, I wanted to remove a tree from my front yard as the roots had broken my concrete driveway as well as a drainage pipe adjacent to the driveway beneath the tree. I called an arborist here in town for his diagnosis. He confirmed that the tree was the cause of the damage and that he'd remove it, but not before I called DigAlert.

As our community, like all other Orange County communities, continues to grow, so does the important infrastructure that we depend on which is buried underground. Just about anywhere you dig there could be an underground facility lying in "wait." With this being the case, how do you avoid hitting them?

The easiest way—and the legal way—is to call Underground Service Alert of Southern California, a.k.a. DigAlert. DigAlert is a free service that locates any hidden dangers below the ground. All you have to do is call 811, the toll-free number, 48 hours prior to your scheduled work. They will send a "locator" to your excavation site, and mark the area for electrical, communications, sewer, gas-oil-steam, water and reclaimed water. The location of your excavation project may not have any of the

above hidden dangers, but DigAlert will verify that for you.

Why does DigAlert exist? The answer is simple. In the past, excavations have taken place in residential and/or commercial zones that have resulted in injuries and/or deaths because the person or crews had no knowledge of hidden dangers below the ground. DigAlert is a one-call system that provides an invaluable resource that will protect lives, property and business.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that the location that you're digging in has no hidden dangers. If you accidentally break a gas line, it could explode into a fire causing injury and or death. If you accidentally break a water line, there could be unexpected disruptions to your home or business.

The call is free. The service is free. Membership in DigAlert is for all individuals, firms, corporations and governmental or public entities or agencies that own or maintain underground facilities. It is a non-profit mutual-benefit organization usually made up of cities, counties, public utilities, water agencies, cable television operators and others who have underground facilities. This service is funded by said stakeholders. The city of San Juan Capistrano is a member agency, representing our water services. If you don't make the

call and you accidentally break an underground line, you are subject to legal sanctions for your actions. Don't make the mistake of cutting a fiber-optic cable or to the hazardous situation of damaging a power line or gas main. Failure to call and have locators mark your excavation area can result in fines up to \$50,000, and you could be charged with the repair costs of a damaged underground facility.

For my tree removal, DigAlert came out and marked the area where my tree was to be removed. In my case, they marked the area indicating that there were no underground dangers present. After that, the arborist in town removed my problem tree, and we replaced it with a tree that is happier not breaking up concrete driveways and drainage pipes. If you want to visit the Web site, go to www.DigAlert.org.

If you have questions regarding emergency preparedness and/or signing up for the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), please contact me at 949.234.4565 or mcantor@sanjuancapistrano.org. I also welcome any topic ideas you may have for future columns. Thanks for taking the time to be prepared.

Resident Michael Cantor is Emergency Services Coordinator for the city of San Juan Capistrano. Part of his duties includes development of the CERT. ■

