

Unificationists Join March Against Drugs and Violence in Montana

Mike Yakawich
June 14, 2011



On June 11th, 2011, the community of Billings, Montana took part in the 14th Annual March against Drugs and Violence (MADV). Though strong thunderstorms were predicted, God was so good providing sunshine and great weather. This is an event of networking and partnering that helps address some serious social issues of drugs and violence through education and community participation. As Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer has written, “The award-winning event is one of the longest and largest existing anti-drug and anti-violence marches and programs in the state...I commend you for taking a stand against drugs and violence, and am pleased to support the March Against Drugs and Violence.”

Planned months in advance and co-sponsored by the Boys and Girls Clubs of Yellowstone County, United Way, Roots of Promise, DUI Taskforce, the Billings Police Department, Tumbleweed Teen Runaway Program, Rimrock Foundation, Passages, Not In Our Town, the Family Church, Elks Lodge, Montana American Clergy Leadership Conference and several other community organizations and churches, the turnout this year was exceptional. The Billings Gazette did a great article the following day on June 12th, 2011, **Start a Chain Reaction: Hundreds march against drugs, violence, bullying.** [link](#)

Originally founded by Unification Church members in 1998 with nine youth, a handful of parents and two local clergy, the march has grown into a citywide community event. The program began with an enthusiastic group at the Courthouse Lawn. Pastor Mike Yakawich of the Family Church/American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC), Brian Dennis of Boys and Girls Clubs of Yellowstone County were masters of ceremonies for the program. The event began with music in the background from the Limited Warranty Band. Throughout the day, more than 350 tee shirts were given to the first participants with the theme printed on its front, “Start a Chain Reaction”.

Lt. Governor John Bohlinger made it clear when he stated, “My grandson died of an overdose of drugs and alcohol at the age of 19. We simply cannot just close our eyes. Stick our heads in the sand and hope that violence subsides and that drugs will simply go away.”

Montana Attorney General Steve Bullock told the crowd, “Today’s march is an important way to send a message that the Billings community is prepared to take a strong stand against drugs and violence.”

Our program began with a wonderful prayer by Pastor Melvin Terry of the All Nations Christian Fellowship. His prayer was firm as he stated, "We seek His guidance and wisdom in addressing the drugs, racial and gang violence in our city."



Anti-bullying Campaign Promoted

This year we had many students from local schools invited through Rachel's Challenge, which is an anti-bullying program. Youth brought hundreds of paper chains, each of which represented a random act of kindness and carried the chains with them. Students of several other schools worked on a Box Mural project in which art classes made murals on boxes and displayed them at the courthouse lawn. Kristi Drake of United Way invested a great deal of time in arranging these new components to our march this year and helped make it a great success. Even the Chief of Police created part of a mural!

Billings Mayor Tom Hanel was then invited to welcome all on behalf of the city of Billings. The Mayor praised the work of the march and its importance. With his wife's birthday the next day, Mrs. Yakawich presented flowers on behalf of the March organizers to Mrs. Hanel. Billings Chief of Police Rich St. John commented, "I have been part of this march from the very beginning. It has grown and has shown the community we care, we stand, we march against these serious challenges."

Our march was led by Boy Scout Troop #7 under the leadership of Mr. Chad Martin. The entire group of marchers walked about one mile around the downtown area of Billings. A Billings Police Department bike patrol guided the group, providing safety and traffic stops all along the way. It was especially inspiring for many to walk in the middle of 27th Street, the busiest street downtown. The marchers blew horns along with the Elks Club Anti-Drug mascot, "Elroy," walking the entire distance. Inside Elroy this year was a college student from Montana State University at Billings, John Yakawich.

Motivational Speeches from Recovering Addicts

Upon returning to the Court-House lawn and music by the band for the main event, participants heard from Pastor Mike Iverson of the Yellowstone Church, who led the audience in prayer over the meal. As people proceeded to a barbecue on the lawn provided by volunteers, they listened to some wonderful inspirational speakers, including State Senator Kim Gillan, Bob Hillard of the Elks Lodge and two dynamic ladies who are recovering addicts. The two ladies from Passages spoke passionately about their past lives and encouraged all not to follow in their footsteps.

Local media gave fantastic support for the event. The local CBS and NBC affiliates did interviews with Rev. Mike Yakawich earlier in the week. A week before the event, the Billings Gazette printed a guest column titled: “Join community march against drugs, violence” by Police Chief Rich St. John. (Below)

Such events provide a positive model for addressing the problem of drugs and violence, and an opportunity is provided to present sound information for the participants to deal with these serious issues. The march also demonstrates that organizations can work together to find common ground. Mr. Jim Corson, representing the office of U.S. Senator Max Baucus, presented march organizers with a flag which had been flown over the U.S. Capitol, thus acknowledging the 14 years of this program. County Commissioner Bill Kennedy and others recognized all for taking leadership in this successful community event and encouraged us to keep it going.

Our other sponsors included Signs Etc., Coca Cola, Meadow Gold, and Southside IGA, who donated a banner or gave at cost a great deal of refreshments, ice-cream and food for the barbecue. Many sponsors brought volunteers to help set up, cook, clean up, and offer background support. Unsung heroes of the annual event include Councilman Jim Ronquillo who has been our lead cook for the barbeque, Tumbleweed and Passages’ volunteers, church members and families.

You could sense a real community atmosphere. Billings citizens were sitting in the park, listening to the speakers and music as well as talking with each other. We had many families with children, and several races, faiths, and cultures joined the event. The weather was fantastic. We also handed out more than 250 information packets. There were several door prizes given including a bike, iPod and many “give-aways” provided by Not In Our Town, Tumbleweed, and United Way: Roots of Promise, ELKS and Costco.

More than a few participants told me that people felt grateful for such a positive event and were genuinely uplifted.

Contributed by Rev. Mike Yakawich, state leader of Montana.

"Start a Chain Reaction"

Hundreds march against drugs, violence, bullying

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[By SUSAN OLP Of The Gazette Staff](#)

The Billings Gazette

Saturday, June 11, 2011



BOB ZELLAR/Gazette Staff Marchers carry paper chains representing 30,000 random acts of kindness by Billings students during the school year. The chain was carried during the March Against Drugs and Violence in downtown Billings on Saturday

Webster's Dictionary defines chain reaction as a series of events so related to one another that each one initiates the next.

In human terms, one good deed inspires another and another and so on. Students in School District 2 discovered that this past school year, and they and others carried proof of it Saturday afternoon during the 14th annual March Against Drugs and Violence.

More than 200 marchers paraded downtown carrying signs and a rainbow of paper chains that represented all of the random acts of kindness recorded at several Billings schools. The theme of this year's march was "Start a Chain Reaction."

The students who participated in Rachel's Challenge at area schools this year were an addition to the march that has grown every year. Their presence was part of the new anti-bullying theme added to the event.

Students decorated cardboard boxes to create a portable mural, with messages focusing on positive behavior. The mural sat on the Yellowstone County Courthouse lawn, where part of the event took place, and people were invited to add their own messages to the boxes.

The band Limited Warranty played on the lawn before and after the march. Booths were set up for adults and kids to play and to gather information, and after the march, everyone was treated to lunch.

A series of speakers, introduced by the event's longtime organizer, the Rev. Mike Yakawich, addressed the crowd. Yellowstone County Commissioner Bill Kennedy shared some statistics with the audience: In 2009, 547 people in Yellowstone County went into treatment for drug and alcohol abuse; 365 alcohol-related vehicle crashes occurred, which caused the death of 11 people.

Billings Mayor Tom Hanel equated drug and alcohol abuse to cancer.

"I don't think there's any one of us here today that doesn't know somebody that's been touched by that terrible disease," Hanel said. "Drugs is exactly the same thing. It's a terrible, terrible thing. It can affect any one of us at any time through your friends, your family, your acquaintances."

He also said drugs and alcohol can lead to bullying. Hanel encouraged his audience to go out and share all that they learned Saturday with others.

Billings Police Chief Rich St. John, who has taken part in every march, said he would never have thought 14 years ago that the event would have grown to the size it is now. Referring to the statistics Kennedy quoted, St. John said his department's ultimate goal is to see those numbers drop to zero.

"But it's going to take your involvement in cooperation with law enforcement," he said. "We can't do it alone, and you can't do it alone either. So in partnership, we'll make a huge difference."

Lisa Scott, coordinator of all the Rachel's Challenge groups in the SD2 schools, explained the positive effect the program has had on students this year. Rachel Scott was one of the students killed at Columbine High, and her life inspired a national campaign in schools to, among other things, eliminate prejudice and look for the good in all people.

Rachel Scott also urged other students to dare to dream and to choose positive influences, including the people they hang around, Scott said.

"She also challenged us to use kind words and to do little acts of kindness," Scott said.

Each of the links in the paper chains came from an act of kindness, recorded by students, teachers, parents and staff, Scott said. That added up to about 30,000 acts of kindness over the school year, she said.

The last thing Rachel Scott encouraged students to do was to start a chain reaction, Scott said.

"My students at Castle Rock Middle School have told me that they have seen changes in the hallway of how students treat one another," she said.

"They see more people open doors one another. They see them pick up books that are dropped instead of kicking them down the hallway."

Saturday's march was sponsored by the Roots of Promise Coalition at the United Way, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Yellowstone County, Tumbleweed, Passages, the Rimrock Foundation, the

Elks, Not in Our Town, the Billings Area Family Violence Task Force and the Montana Meth Project.