

An Enchanted Evening in Margaret Hudson's Backyard...

Benefit helps VORP raise funds, awareness

Ron Claassen

VORP's first art event, "An Enchanted Evening in Margaret Hudson's Backyard," was a great event in many ways.

Margaret, a dedicated, long-time VORP supporter, opened her renowned back yard to hundreds of guests. She also sculpted a lion and lamb lying together – a beautiful symbol of peacemakers' aspirations – for VORP to offer as a prize to event contributors.

Coffee, cappuccino, and specialty desserts were provided by several local merchants. A string quartet composed of Fresno Pacific College students entertained our old and new friends.

We estimate that nearly 250 people joined in the celebration. Some were just being introduced to VORP; others have been friends and VORP supporters for more than a decade.

Since our income has not kept up with expenses in 1994, the benefit enabled us to make you, our donors, and the community aware of VORP's financial needs. You responded by contributing nearly \$4,500. Thank you!

We would also like to thank the local merchants who help make the evening a success: Earth Arts Studio, Pacific Printing, Krakatoa Coffee & Trading Company, Gorgeous Foods, Cakes by Joann, Price/Costco, and Java Café.

The lucky winner of the Margaret Hudson "Lion and Lamb" sculpture was Louis Claassen – my father. (Margaret selected the winning ticket.) When I telephoned my parents to tell them, my dad's first response was "Oh, no! Somebody else should have won. We just wanted to support VORP!"

Well, congratulations, dad. I don't doubt at all that you wanted to

support VORP, as you have for the last ten years. Thank you for your continuous support. I hope you enjoy the sculpture.

The "Lion and Lamb" lying peacefully together symbolizes the essence of VORP.

Through the efforts of dozens of faithful volunteer mediators and financial

contributors, many crime victims and offenders experience a peaceful resolution to their conflict – as unlikely as that might seem.

This month's story from Melinda Vaughn, an attorney and VORP volunteer mediator, illustrates what can happen when justice is defined as "making things right" – not punishment. All it takes is a person who is willing to ask what might at first seem utterly foolish: "Would you like to work at making things right?"

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Boys admit wrongdoing, agree to work off debt after breaking school window

School should be source of pride, said offender's father

Melinda Vaughn

The mediation took place in the school's library on a Saturday morning last month. Present for the victim, a local middle school, were Ed and

"Vandalism destroys the school pride that teachers and students are trying to build." Karen, the vice-principal and an eighth-grade teacher.

The two juvenile offenders, Alberto and Pao, were present, along with their parents. The meeting began with introductions and an explanation of the VORP process.

The process begins with each participant telling what happened and how they felt about it in order to recognize the injustice that occurred. After the injustice has been recognized, the mediator helps participants negotiate an agreement to restore equity

between victim and offender. Finally, the participants clarify their future intentions toward one another.

The "recognizing injustice" portion of the mediation went well. Pao first told his story and related his feelings. Ed then summarized Pao's story – restating the facts and feelings as Pao understood them.

Ed then explained to Alberto and Pao how this and similar offenses affect the school, students, teachers, and staff. He also related his own feelings of anger, sadness, and frustration. Ed told the boys that the school is like a second home to him, since he spends so much of his time there.

Karen talked to Pao and Alberto about vandalism from a teacher's perspective. She explained that a broken window cannot be fixed for ten days and disrupts the class. More important, Karen said, vandalism destroys

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School: Vandalism case ends in 'working' agreement

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the school pride that teachers and students are trying to build.

Alberto and Pao summarized what Ed and Karen said. They had trouble remembering some of the details, but with prompting, they remembered most of what was said.


Alberto's father also participated in the discussion. He said he wanted his son to be proud of his school and do things to better it — not destroy it.

When the parties agreed that the injustice had been recognized, they moved on to the issue of restitution. Each family had been billed \$128 to repair the broken window, but Ed said he was reluctant to have the boys' parents pay. They had not committed the crime, and Ed doubted the boys would bear the burden of the offense if their parents paid the school. However, neither of the boys had any type of job or ability to repay the school for the damage they had done.

Ed proposed an alternative. He suggested that Pao and Alberto each could work off his debt by helping a janitor with cleaning and maintenance after school. Ed estimated 60 hours' work (30 hours for each boy) to be equivalent to the cost of repairing the window. Pao and Alberto agreed to do the work and report their progress to Ed on a regular basis.

Ed also suggested that each of the boys sign up for a school club or sport during remainder of the school year, and Alberto and Pao agreed.

Ed offered some valuable closing comments. He congratulated Pao, Alberto, and their parents for participating in VORP, and he thanked the boys for admitting that they had done wrong.

After the mediation agreements were signed, the meeting was concluded. As the boys were leaving, Ed assured Alberto and Pao that theirs is a forgiving school, and he holds no grudge against them. 

[Note: names of VORP participants have been changed to assure confidentiality.]

VORP waging peace against crime

VORP is waging peace against crime! The good news is that the number of volunteer mediators is growing. The challenge is to increase the financial base so that staffing is available to support the volunteer mediators' increased capacity for case work. *VORP relies entirely on your contribution!* To meet this challenge and sustain the momentum generated by the "Enchanted Evening in Margaret Hudson's Backyard," VORP needs at least 50 new sustaining individual friends. A regular \$10-\$20 contribution (or comparable quarterly or annual contribution) means a lot to VORP. *You can help!* When you make a contribution, you are a peacemaker. Try it and see how true it is: "Blessed are the Peacemakers."

You can become a volunteer VORP mediator. In addition to making a contribution to the larger community, you will be improving your peacemaking skills for use at home, work, church, etc. The fee is \$15 for those who plan to work with at least three cases. The training is \$75 for others. Call Laura or Kathy (291-1120) to register. *The next training sessions are February 3-4 and March 20, 27 & April 3.*

Shalom,

Ron Claassen, Director

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