

Oakland high schools looking for teen heroes

Students who unselfishly help others are eligible for contest, which aims to foster inspiration among the young.

By Alex Katz
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OAKLAND -- The search is on for teenage heroes in city high schools, led by a motivational author who plans to feature a heroic Oakland student in her next book.

Students have until Oct. 1 to submit nominations for the **Young Heroes of Oakland Contest**, sponsored by author **Marianne Larned** and the **Stone Soup Leadership Institute**, a Bay Area nonprofit group named after Larned's book.

Students who help others in some way are eligible to enter the contest, meant to inspire young people to become heroes and incidentally promote Larned's next book, "*Stone Soup for the New World*."

A winner from each city high school will be honored at a celebration at **Fremont High** on Nov. 1, and one teenager will make it into the book. Larned said the Oakland contest will launch a nationwide campaign celebrating young heroes.

Larned's previous 1998 collection of stories about regular-people-turned-heroes, "*Stone Soup for the World*," featured a chapter on **Oakland Fire Capt. Ray Gatchalian**, who led a group of neighbors to save homes from the 1991 East Bay hills firestorm.

"Everybody isn't a saint, right?" Larned asked a group of students at a press conference in Fremont High's library last week. "People have been through tough times, but how they get to be heroes is helping others."

Oakland school officials, including school **Superintendent Dennis Chaconas** and school **board member Jean Quan**, came to the Melrose-area school to lend their support to the contest and motivate students.

"In this neighborhood, so many kids have died (from violence)," Quan said. "You live in tough times, you live in what is considered a tough neighborhood. But despite that you keep on going, and we expect you to make it across that (graduation) stage."

Also present was **Gerald "Whiz" Ward II**, one of the people already chosen to be in Larned's upcoming book.

Ward, a **San Francisco State University** student, works with the nonprofit **Youth Radio**, which trains young people for media jobs and can be heard Friday nights in some parts of town on KPFB-Radio (89.3 FM).

The Youth Radio program "helps to foster the idea of seizing opportunity in young people," Ward said. "It teaches you to venture so you can gain something."

Several **Fremont High** students said this week that they hadn't heard of the contest. But sophomore **Terrell West** said he would nominate his brother, Paul West, who is known at Fremont High for small acts of heroism such as breaking up fights and helping lost students find classes.

"There's not a lot of people at the school like that," Terrell said.