



Bellflower Unified School District

Media Release

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Bellflower Unified Siblings Awarded National Prize for Red Ribbon Week Photo Contest

BELLFLOWER – Bellflower Unified School District siblings Beman and Patricia Rezkalla went all out for the 2014 National Red Ribbon Week Photo Contest, decorating not only the door of their family's home with the event's theme, but themselves as well.

The siblings, a third-grader and kindergartener at Bellflower Unified School District's Intensive Learning Center in Lakewood, beat out hundreds of contestants to take one of 10 national prizes awarded to families.

The students were recognized for their victory Jan. 12 during a school-wide assembly.

It is the first win for Bellflower Unified and Los Angeles County in the photo contest, which was launched four years ago as a way of including families in the National Family Partnership's (NFP) school-focused anti-drug program. Previous California winners hailed from Irvine, Belmont and Fullerton.

Beman and Patricia, who live in Bellflower, created a giant, glittery bow beneath the words "Love Yourself. Be Drug Free." – Red Ribbon Week's 2014 theme. Then they posed wearing red shirts with the words "Drug" on Beman and "Free" on Patricia.

Beman said inspiration for the picture came from their mother, who taught music classes in Egypt before the family immigrated to the U.S. in 2014. The children started at Bellflower Unified this fall.

"Love people and love yourself – that's very good," Beman said about the slogan, adding that he was completely surprised when his family won the contest.

More than 188,000 people cast votes for the photographs in November. The 10 winning families each

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Bellflower Unified School District

received \$1,000 for their school and an iPad for themselves.

On Monday, DEA Special Agent Vijay Rathi presented Beman and Patricia with the \$1,000 check for their school and encouraged students to advocate against drugs.

"Start thinking about what it really means to keep our communities' drug free," Rathi told the more than 600 students gathered for the presentation.

Bellflower Unified Superintendent Dr. Brian Jacobs presented the children with proclamations from U.S. Rep. Linda Sanchez and Assemblyman Anthony Rendon.

"I couldn't be more proud of Beman and Patricia," said Dr. Isel Taylor, principal of the Intensive Learning Center. "They have lived in America for just six months, but have thrown themselves into the full swing of school and community activities."

Beman and Patricia's mother, Shereen Elyas, praised the photo contest for opening a dialogue about the issue of drugs in her home and neighborhood.

"My son and daughter are young, they didn't know about drugs," she told the Partnership. "But this opened the door for a friendly conversation. ... Neighbors asked us about our decorations and we talked to them about it."

National Red Ribbon Week was created in remembrance of DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena, who was slain in Mexico in 1985. Held each October, it includes a series of school-based events designed to create an anti-drug culture among the young.

"Students celebrate Red Ribbon Week in over 100,000 schools across the country and overseas," said NFP President Peggy Sapp. "We designed the contest to bring the Red Ribbon message home and to give parents a chance to talk about the dangers of drug abuse. By receiving the same message at home, in school and in the community, children are significantly more likely to really hear and benefit from the prevention message. We applaud the Rezkalla family for their achievement."

Jacobs underscored the importance of the partnership's drug-free message.

"It's so important that we communicate with our students from a young age about the dangers of drugs and alcohol," Jacobs said. "This contest was a great way to highlight this issue in a meaningful way even as it provided our students with recognition for the great work they are doing. I want to congratulate Beman, Patricia and their family and thank them for proudly representing the Intensive Learning Center and Bellflower Unified."

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Bellflower Unified School District provides a pathway for all students to attain the expertise and develop skills of academic excellence that will empower them to become lifelong active learners, demonstrate respect for themselves and others in a dynamic, diverse and global society, become responsible, informed, productive, independent and contributing citizens, and perform successfully in their chosen field and in society.



Bellflower Unified School District

For more information on Red Ribbon Week and the photo contest, go to redribbon.org.

PHOTO CAPTION 1: Bellflower USD students Beman and Patricia Rezkalla stand in front of their Red Ribbon photo contest winning poster.

Photos from the ceremony will be available at caschoolnews.net at 1 p.m. Jan. 12.

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