

Do The Right Thing, Speaker Welsh Says

By Kate Prahlad

HARRISONBURG - Sometimes, doing the right thing can bring on some intense peer pressure - peer pressure that might even include an “atomic wedgie” - but the right thing is still worth doing.

That’s the message that Cathleen Welsh relayed to the audience at the Harrisonburg Rotary Club’s meeting Monday, at which 58 students received the club’s Code of Ethics awards.

Welsh, a local attorney, said she chose her speech’s title, “Walking the Ethical Path: Sometimes a Road Less Traveled,” not to “impress the businessmen and women, but to connect with my fellow Disney Channel fans.”

In an episode of “The Suite Life of Zack and Cody,” a Disney sitcom about twins, one boy has to attend summer school, where the class is studying Robert Frost’s poem “A Road Not Taken,” Welsh said.

The boy bravely raises his hand, despite the pressure to slack off in class, and explains that the poem means forging one’s own path in life, Welsh said.

For that, he gets the respect of the teachers, but also an “atomic wedgie” from the school’s bully.

Welsh called on the students to do the same in a world where ethical behavior is not routine, but exceptional.

“You are exceptional,” she told the students. “We need you to continue to be.”

Students Honored

Only 58 students from the 29 county and city schools received awards, two students from each elementary school (fifth-graders), middle school (eighth-graders), and high school (seniors). The selection process differs among the schools.

The award program is the result of a development campaign conducted by the Rotary’s Code of Ethics Committee that raised funds to endow each school. More than 50 businesses and individuals contributed to this program.

The students are selected from each school on the basis of truthfulness, fairness, consistency, dependability, integrity, service to others, concern for others, friendliness, depth of commitments and reverence, said Malcolm Lane, chairman of the Code of Ethics Committee.

“When you are president of your company ... the plaque we gave you will hang on your wall as the first part of your long career based on ethical decisions,” Lane said.

One student recognized for her ethics was Kelsey Miller, a senior at Turner Ashby High School.

“It’s a really special award because it was voted on by my class,” Miller said. “It’s an honor.”



Photo by Michael Reilly

Miller plans to attend the University of Virginia and major in English, hoping to become a high school teacher.

“I value leadership qualities,” Miller said. “When I pursue becoming an educator, I’ll need them.”

Walking The Ethical Path

To Lane, the award is about recognizing students for doing what’s right in any situation.

The ethical path “emphasizes the importance of those decisions,” Lane said, adding that one quality he prized most was that of integrity.

Welsh, who is with Lenhart Obenshain, has concentrated her practice in employment law for more than 15 years, and has been recognized in the “Legal Elite” by Virginia Business Magazine every year since 2003.

She is a past president of the Harrisonburg Rockingham Chamber of Commerce and currently serves as vice chairman of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce. She lives in Harrisonburg with her husband and two children.

The ethical path has helped her at many crossroads in her career and personal life, she said, when facing the choice between doing something selfish and doing the right thing.

“So, walk the ethical path, even if it is the less-traveled one,” Welsh told the students. “Because with your help, it will someday be the superhighway.”

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