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Bellace entertains crowds with his positive comedic message

Speaks to teens and adults about achieving natural highs and supporting positive choices

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Renowned speaker, comedian and clinical psychologist Matt Bellace visited Swan River last Wednesday (Feb. 20) to share his messages with youth and parents about making positive choices.

Bellace's first stop was to the SVRSS where he delivered to the students his 'Get High Naturally' message. He provided the same hilariously thought provoking presentation to Grade 7 and 8 students from across the Valley later that afternoon at the Veterans Community Hall.

"Here's the problem with scare tactics and why they don't work," Bellace told the students. "If you tell young people that you drink, you do drugs, you're going to die, then they'll go to a party and (see people doing this) and say that nobody is dead, the speaker was wrong.

"But the speaker wasn't wrong. Alcohol and drug use kills tens of thousands of people every year. Look at the celebrities alone - Whitney Huston, Michael Jackson... Charlie Sheen's career," he joked.

Bellace went on to promote natural highs and the four key things he believes are necessary to lead a naturally high life.

Using the acronym L.E.A.D. he taught the students ways to lean on healthy people for support, express themselves in a healthy way, achieve natural highs, and to not be afraid to take a stand.

Throughout the program he engaged the youth through individual and group activities that supported his lessons.

"He was hilarious - just really, really funny," said Evan Harris, a Grade 7 student at ESRSS who agreed with the message that Bellace shared.



"He taught us about making some really good choices."

"He was funny and made (listening) more exciting," said CBF Christian School Grade 7 student Tiana Liske. "He kept our attention while telling us that using drugs now will really effect you when you're older."

In the evening, Valley parents attended 'Supporting Your Teen in Making Positive Choices', the presentation that Bellace offers in conjunction with his teen geared program.

The program focused on how parents can communicate with their teens without arguing on topics like responsibility, healthy coping and alcohol and drug use.

Following the presentations, Bellace discussed his love of comedy and speaking, as well as what he tries to achieve every time he picks up a microphone.

"I enjoy the reaction and feedback," said Bellace. "Any comedian will tell you that it is a natural high.

"The first goal is to connect with (the audience) so you know they are open and will listen to your

message. For students, it's so intense and they really appreciate the humour. Sometimes it's hard to get them but once you do they are good laughers."

After Bellace creates a connection with his audience he provides the group with his message.

"Ultimately I want to be heard and it would be great if the students left here and had a conversation with their parents about the presentation and why they enjoyed it," he said. "It gives parents an opportunity to talk as well."

Following his presentations, Bellace provided the opportunity for some one-on-one time in the form of an autograph signing session where he spent a few minutes with each student in line talking about natural highs.

"If I had the time to do a workshop with them I would get them to explore some things they love to do," Bellace said. "So, in the brief interaction (I do get) I ask them what their natural high is. Some of them can't answer but they start thinking about it and it becomes a teaching opportunity.

"If they tell me one or two I try to include it in wishing them many natural highs."

By listening to Bellace speak about natural highs it is clear that he believes strongly in his message - so strongly that he himself has never followed the path of drugs or alcohol.

"My presentation for the most part validates the youth that are trying to make healthy choices - this makes up the majority of students," he said. "I'm not the kind of speaker who necessarily connects with those who are using substances.

"There was one situation at a college where I did my presentation at an orientation program. A student took my book (*A Better High*) and went home, put it on the shelf and continued to use. He got busted two months later, went through a program and discovered something that he loved to do," Bellace continued.

"(Later) he wrote me an email about how at the time he thought my presentation was a joke but he was glad he had the book and was able to read it.

"I planted a seed and for some of these students it might be irrelevant but in the coming years when they start seeing substance abuse it might come back."

Bellace's book is available online through his website at www.mattbellace.com or through www.amazon.ca.

