

Abraxas receives student services grant

By **Pat Kumpan**

A \$238,169 grant from Alliance Healthcare Foundation of San Diego will keep a student services program alive for Abraxas High School students for another three years.

When school officials watched their student services budget dwindle without hope of being revitalized in late spring, they knew that the motivating activities that keep kids in school were destined for elimination, according to Principal Dan Lopez.

"We couldn't let that happen because it's one of the reasons that test scores are up and more students are graduating," Lopez said.

Lopez, along with educators Kathy Kosich, Mary Jo Utterback and veteran grant writer Sharon Jahn, began to search for non-profits and other agencies that could help keep the vital program going.

They knew that health education, mentoring, one-on-one counseling and

intervention services not only provide at-risk students with a better outlook on life, but educators who provide the services keep those students focused on academics — and life beyond high school, Lopez said.

Attendance rates at Abraxas have jumped dramatically from 69.5 percent in the 2003-2004 school year to 85.7 percent in the 2004-2005 school year.

Ninety one students graduated in the 2004-2005 school year compared to 61 the previous school year, and while it might not seem a substantial trend to some, it's downright "monumental" at Abraxas, Lopez said.

Students get transferred to the continuation school for all sorts of reasons: behavior, drug and alcohol use, plummeting grades, or, in some cases, because traditional schools can't accommodate flexible schedules for those who are pursuing Olympic careers or other goals.

Olympic skater Todd Eldridge was one of those students who needed to

attend Abraxas so he could keep up with early morning sessions at ice rinks and skating competitions.

Many PUSD students get a second chance at Abraxas and discover they can finish their schooling and enter either the work force or reach for a college degree, instead of dropping out of school, according to Lopez.

Team the efforts of student services, which is coordinated by Kathy Kosich, along with a "block" schedule — a 10-week session with a two week break — initiated more than a year ago and students have more reasons to

Please see Grant page A12

Grant

Continued from page A7

stay in school, she said.

"They get two core classes plus a lengthy homeroom period for studying, mentoring and other class preparation in a welcoming environment," Kosich said. "There's a sense of accomplishment."

School takes on a whole new meaning when you want to come to school, complete homework and see what that leads, Lopez said.

Abraxas, a continuation school in the Poway Unified School District, is the only PUSD school to receive the Student Alliance for Education grant, known as SAFE, according to Lopez.

Abraxas qualified first for an emergency \$25,000 SAFE grant that kept counseling, intervention, mentoring and other health education services between June and late August available for the 300 to 400 students attending Abraxas.

After the SAFE program along with student services efforts were evaluated, results indicated that students' resiliency improved while reports of violence and bullying on campus decreased among program participants.