

# Red Ribbon Parade showcases community support for a drug-free lifestyle

By: Neil A. Johnson | Source: Unterrified Democrat

In honor of Red Ribbon Week at schools in the county, both private and parochial, a parade was held in Linn that included students from Linn R-2 and St. George, with support from the community.

"We had a cold morning for a parade, but everything worked out, and it turned out to be a great event," said community organizer Charlotte Bellsmith.

A light rain held off as students marched down Main Street, many in red shirts to denote the unity of spirit Bellsmith hoped would be achieved to demonstrate a stand against drugs.

"I really enjoyed seeing the kids have fun," Bellsmith said. "This was a great way to show that you don't need drugs and alcohol to have a good time."

Other schools had agreed to participate but declined due to the colder weather. That didn't dampen the mood of those involved.

"Our kids have the spirit of many," said Bellsmith. "The excitement of watching St. George band mix it up with Linn was heartwarming, to say the least. The banners warmed my heart. When we got to St George, I was so excited to see all the kids standing there watching the remainder of the parade go by. They watched State Tech, Three Rivers, Osage Ambulance District and Linn Fire make their way down Main Street with those that stood up and walked with them to celebrate their choice to be drug free. It was a sight to behold."

Linn Elementary Principal Lorie Winslow added that all of the people who turned out for the event made the day memorable. "Marching through town and seeing all of the community support along with the band and support from State Tech was awesome," she said, noting that Red Ribbon Week began Monday at R-2. "We want the children of Osage County to know they have the support of everyone to be alcohol and drug free."

Another great aspect to the parade was the fact that students from different schools were able to interact.

"We don't take time to collaborate with our students and the students of St. George," said Winslow. "Our students loved visiting their school and interacting with them for the morning."

St. George Principal Lisa Grellner said the parade was a wonderful way to kickoff Red Ribbon Week. "It showed that the community support a drug-free lifestyle in our county," she said. "Our students need to realize that the only way to live up to their full potential is by avoiding the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse. We, as a community, need to do everything we can do for the prevention of these harmful choices. The parade was a positive way to make a statement about healthy choices with the community standing behind our students."

The best part, Bellsmith said, was having Linn senior Ryan Platt, as the first Osage County Anti-Drug Community Action Team (OC-ADCAT) Student of the Month for the year, serve as Grand Marshal in the parade.

“He is a perfect, outstanding role model for all our kids, and the best Grand Marshal we could ask for,” said Bellsmith. “He set a good example all morning, staying and helping to give out cookies and water after the assembly. He handed out candy to each kiddo too, and really offered a great example of a drug and alcohol free student. I would like to see our students of the month step up and work with the younger kids, talking about staying drug and alcohol free.”

Platt led students in a pledge to remain drug free during Thursday’s Red Ribbon Week assembly at St. George.

Tijera Safir from the Council for a Drug Free Youth encouraged students to make good choices, and interacted with them during the Red Ribbon assembly at St. George.

Students were also able to view a large inflatable lung, which displayed both healthy and diseased tissue to demonstrate the dangers of smoking cigarettes and other drugs.

Following the event, students returned to school, with St. George having concluded Red Ribbon Week, and Linn R-2 set to begin activities on Monday of this week.

“Red Ribbon Week has been part of schools for a while now, and each school will have a variety of activities this week, but it was great to be able to get so many students together for this parade, and let them have some fun,” said Bellsmith. “Thank you to everyone who made this special.”