

Youth Day at Freedom a success
By **Ruth Roberts** / Brentwood Press
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OAKLEY -- Aja Butler, executive director of the Contra Costa County Girl Power organization, talks with girls about confidence, self-esteem and body issues during the Contra Costa County Youth Day event at Freedom High School.

The Contra Costa County Youth Summit got a makeover this year: a new name, a new look and plenty of brand-new enthusiasm. Just ask Celestina Amigo.

“It’s cool, really cool,” said the 15 year-old Pittsburg resident. “I went to this last year and it was good, but this was better. I don’t know – it’s just more fun and there’s more to choose from.”

Variety was an important component of the newly christened Youth Day event. The fourth annual affair hosted at Freedom High School last weekend drew nearly 300 teens from throughout the county for a daylong series of workshops aimed at reaching the county’s youth in a positive, proactive way.

“This program is just a wonderful opportunity for the youth of Oakley and the whole county to come together in a positive spirit that celebrates youth,” said Oakley Councilman Kevin Romick, who spoke at the event. “It also gives them (participants) some life skills and options for after high school. I think it’s a great program.”

Participants were offered a variety of workshops to choose from, encompassing such topics as small-business management, video production and CPR classes. Rotating their way through a handful of 15-to-30-minute mini-classes, the idea was to offer a representative sampling of options with both fun and practical applications.

Aja Butler, executive director of Contra Costa County Girl Power, hosted a workshop touting makeup tips and health advice, but the general emphasis was on stressing the positive power of being a girl.

Butler asked the females in the room – and there were a few males as well – to split into groups, find one thing about their neighbor that they liked, and then name one thing about themselves that they liked. She challenged participants to dig deeper and not settle for the superficial image of women portrayed on television and in magazines.

“I know it’s hard sometimes,” said Butler, speaking to one of her Youth Day groups. “I too look at these girls in the media and think, ‘Oh, I wish I had a beautiful, perfect body like that,’ but I know that if I am at a healthy weight, and exercising, then I do have a beautiful, perfect body – and so do you.”

Lindsey Bruno, recreation specialist for the city of Oakley and one of the organizers of the event, said the reason for changing the name from Youth Summit to Youth Day was emphasize on a younger, more hip outlook. But the real purpose of the day, said Bruno, was to arm the participants with a greater, stronger and more confident sense of self, and offer them tools for coping with moral, ethical and personal issues.

“My hope is that the kids came away with greater confidence, but also that they understand they are part of a great community – not just the city that they live in, but the county community as a whole,” said Bruno. “I also hope that they gained some new friendships and new ideas. That’s what I would like them to walk away with.”