

Celebrate N. American Occupational Safety & Health Week MAY 3-9

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BY MATT ALDERTON

FOURTEEN-YEAR-OLD HAYLEY LEMENS OF PENDLETON, ORE., IS SOFT-SPOKEN AND SHY. SHE ALWAYS HAS BEEN, ACCORDING TO HER MOM, JEANIE, WHO SAYS HER DAUGHTER — A STRAIGHT-A STUDENT WHO'S INVOLVED IN EVERYTHING FROM DANCE AND MUSIC TO SWIMMING AND GIRL SCOUTS — OFTEN STRUGGLES SOCIALLY BECAUSE SHE'S SO RESERVED.

"Hayley's always been pretty quiet," Lemens says, "which makes it really hard for her to meet new people and make new friends."

Lately, however, that's been changing. And so has Hayley, who's been raising her hand more often in the classroom and speaking up more loudly outside it. Lemens attributes some of her daughter's development to adolescence. Much of it, however, she credits to the Des Plaines, Ill.-based American Society of Safety Engineers, which sponsors an annual poster contest — the ASSE Kids' "Safety-on-the-Job" Poster Contest — that Hayley won this year.

Twelve when she entered, Hayley placed first in her age group and, as one of 20 national winners, received a \$1,000 savings bond from ASSE. She also was invited to Washington, D.C., in May for a special awards ceremony at the U.S. Capitol, after which her poster — depicting one scientist reminding another to wear her safety goggles in the lab — was blown up into a billboard in her hometown for her entire community to see.

"For somebody who's so shy, to get that kind of recognition is amazing," Lemens says. "She received so much positive reinforcement from her school, peers and neighbors, and that's really helped her self-esteem."

It's also made Hayley, her family, her friends and her teachers more aware of safety situations in the workplace and at home — which is exactly the point, according to ASSE Public Relations Manager Diane Hurns, who started the poster contest eight years ago in order to promote ASSE's mission, its members and the occupational safety, health and environmental profession.

"The poster contest helps teach children about what our members do every day, working to prevent injuries and illnesses," Hurns says. "We aim to teach children about occupational safety; they may or may not recall all the safety information, but they will probably always remember receiving a national award in their nation's capital for their artwork. And when they eventually get their first job, maybe they'll think back, remember safety and consider a career in the safety profession."

FROM NAFTA TO NAOSH WEEK

The ASSE Kids' "Safety-on-the-Job" Poster Contest was born in 2001, shortly after Hurns joined ASSE to launch its public relations department. The association was gearing up for the annual North American Occupational Safety and Health (NAOSH) Week in 2002 and was planning several events designed to increase public awareness around its mission — which is to protect people, property and the environment — by promoting safety and health in the workplace. To do that, it needed to rally its base of more than 32,000 members, who manage and consult on safety issues in at least 14 core industries, including academics, construction, health care, industrial hygiene, insurance, manufacturing, mining, and oil and gas.



Created by Taylor Visker, 9, of Moses Lake, Wash., who took first place in the 9- to 10-year-old category this year.

"We needed something to connect with our members and to show the public what safety really is about," Hurns says. "So, I suggested the poster contest."

NAOSH Week is actually rooted in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that was established in 1994 with the intention of opening trade between Canada, the United States and Mexico. During NAFTA negotiations, the issue of occupational safety came up, at which point Canada's NAFTA representative brought up the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering's Canadian Occupational Health and Safety (COHS) Week — which Canada had been celebrating since 1986. When the diplomat suggested opening COHS Week to the United States and Mexico, CSSE changed the name to NAOSH Week. In 1996, NAOSH Week — to be observed every year during the first week in May — was officially incorporated into NAFTA, which it was a part of until 2000. At that point, CSSE approached ASSE about stimulating U.S. involvement in NAOSH Week activities.

"We have nothing to do with free trade or politics, but in NAFTA — I don't know why — there was this thing called NAOSH Week," says Fred J. Fortman, Jr., LL.M., CAE, ASSE's executive director for the past 11 years. "The Canadians jumped on it faster than we did and when they asked us if we'd be willing to participate in it, we said yes because we're always looking for ways to promote safety and the safety professional."

When Hurns suggested holding a poster contest as part of ASSE's 2002 NAOSH Week activities, Fortman gave her the go-ahead immediately, but with admittedly low expectations. "There's an old vaudeville line, 'You never want to follow kids or animals,' so I thought it could be a good thing to engage our members so they could teach their kids what Mommy and Daddy do at work," Fortman says. "I had no idea, though, that it would become as big as it has."

SKETCHING SUCCESS

Although it's just one of many events on ASSE's annual NAOSH Week calendar, the kids' poster contest has easily become the most popular.

"With very little money, this program has really taken off," Fortman says. "It's become a bandwagon and everybody wants to jump on."

Of course, that's not how it started. In its first year, the kids' poster contest received just 30 entries from its 32,000 members, Hurns says. Luckily, that's all ASSE needed to kick-start an effective word-of-mouth campaign that's helped the contest grow exponentially during its first seven years, culminating in nearly 1,000 poster entries from around the globe in ASSE's 2009 contest.

"The first year was tough, just getting the word out," says Hurns, who promotes the contest and its winners every year with a barrage of communications, including news releases; 30 entries turned into hundreds more, she says, when those news releases earned the first contest winners coverage in local media and recognition from elected officials. "Local ASSE chapters took notice and became very committed. It also gave them a great opportunity to connect with their local communities. They started submitting more entries and really promoting the contest in their communities. So after that first year, it just started steamrolling."

The contest has grown every year since its founding, reaching several important milestones along the way. Perhaps the most important of those was ASSE's first Washington, D.C., awards ceremony. Held on Capitol Hill in 2005 and every year since, it's become a highlight of the annual kids' competition that now includes a Sunday brunch for ASSE members and contest participants, as well as a NAOSH Week kick-off ceremony at the Department of Labor and an ASSE awards ceremony at the U.S. Capitol, both featuring prominent speakers from ASSE and supporting government agencies.

"It's a really nice program for everyone who participates in the contest," says ASSE Regional Vice President James H. Morris III, assistant director of school plant services for Virginia Beach City Public Schools in Virginia Beach, Va. "We only half filled the room at the Capitol the first year, but we've grown every year since and now I think we've about outgrown the space there."

Morris, who heads a subcommittee that now helps plan the annual D.C. events, has been an ardent supporter of the kids' poster contest for the last five years. In fact, his boys, now 13 and 15, entered it when they were 8 and 10. Although neither won, both later attended the first D.C. awards ceremony with their dad in order to help him manage volunteers and participants — a father-son tradition they've maintained every year since.

ABOUT ASSE

Founded in 1911, ASSE is the world's oldest and largest professional safety organization. Its more than 32,000 members manage, supervise and consult on safety, health and environmental issues in industry, insurance, government and education. For more information about the ASSE "Safety-on-the-Job" Kids' Poster Contest, including photos, visit www.asse.org/naosh09.

"I take my kids out of school for the day every year because I feel like they get to learn more in Washington, D.C. — seeing all the government buildings and networking with people from high up in the government and the association — than they'd learn in a day at school," Morris says. "My sons have a blast and look forward to it every year. For them to have a little bit of responsibility at their age at an event like this teaches them the value of volunteer leadership."

Morris doesn't only engage his family in poster contest proceedings. He also engages 16 local ASSE chapters in the Mid-Atlantic region and one international chapter in Kuwait, which he says is among his most enthusiastic poster contest participants, submitting more than 200 posters every year from halfway around the world.

"We encourage local chapters to take it upon themselves to do things in support of the poster contest in their communities," Morris says. "Many of them sponsor contests in their own companies and some even partner with other local businesses and schools to do contests. They give out their own little prizes and then funnel the winners up to the contest at the society level."

That kind of grassroots organizing by ASSE members is how the program has been able to grow so much so fast, according to Hurns. "Our local chapters and members have been critical," she says. "These are volunteers with families and jobs, and they'll help us at the drop of a hat. It's amazing."

FROM THE HEART

ASSE started its kids' poster contest in order to engage members, and engaged members have since responded in spades to support the association — donating more than 1.3 million volunteer hours in 2009 alone to NAOSH Week and the ASSE Kids' "Safety-on-the-Job" Poster Contest. They're not the only ones, though. Major corporations and government agencies have taken notice, too. Most notably, according to Fortman: the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which establishes and enforces the country's safety regulations.

"OSHA is the main regulator of occupational safety and health in this country," Fortman says. "What the IRS is to taxes, they are to safety."

Although government and industry typically work in tandem in many other countries, they're sometimes polarized in the United States, according to Fortman. For that reason, ASSE had always wanted to build a relationship with OSHA; by embracing the regulator, the association believed, it could help the government improve its image while also earning a seat at the policymaking table for ASSE members and advocates.

"Really, OSHA does not want to be perceived as the big bad regulator. They do a ton of things in the training and education area, too. So it's not all stick; there's some carrot there, too," Fortman says. "Still, sometimes they get perceived as the bad guy, trying to come in and beat up our members when they make mistakes on safety. By engaging them and having a working relationship with them, we can improve the perception of OSHA among our members and raise the awareness of our members among OSHA. I think it's good for both parties to get to know each other, because at the end of the day we're on the same side trying to get the same job accomplished, which is sending people home safe from work."

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY STATS

5,488	The annual number of fatal workplace injuries in the United States
3.7	The rate, per 100,000 workers, of fatal injury for U.S. workers
4 million	The annual number of nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in the United States
4.2	The rate, per 100 full-time workers, of nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses for U.S. workers
77,000	The number of teen workers who are hurt badly enough in workplace accidents to end up in hospital emergency rooms
70	The approximate number of teens younger than 18 who die every year from work-related injuries

Sources: ASSE and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Despite wanting a relationship with OSHA, ASSE had never been successful in building one — until the kids' poster contest came along.

"When we launched NAOSH Week with the poster contest, OSHA became interested in participating," Fortman continues. "It didn't happen immediately, but soon after OSHA was calling us saying, 'We'd like to participate.' I'd like to say it was because of the wonderful message that we crafted or because of our brilliant leadership, but in fact it was the kids. All these years we'd been going at OSHA from an analytical point of view; when we used our right brain instead of our left brain, that's when it worked. The kids managed to melt the hearts of a federal agency."

That federal agency is now a regular presence in the kids' poster contest, as OSHA hosts a reception for contest winners every year at the Department of Labor and typically sends a government speaker to address the children and meet their families.

"Most years we go to Congress to lobby that OSHA be given more money," Fortman says. "But this allows us to have a different kind of relationship, and it gives OSHA the chance to humanize itself by promoting safety instead of only enforcing it."

Having poster contest partners helps ASSE turn its biggest challenge — limited resources — into its biggest opportunity, says Hurns, who has a limited budget and just two employees to help plan and execute the kids' poster contest, which requires a seven-month planning process every year that includes logistics and communications with poster contestants and their families, member volunteers, partners and sponsors, speakers, media, venues and caterers, among others. "We have a lot of fires burning at the same time," Hurns says.

Of course, a lot of fires requires a lot of fuel, and a host of corporate partners have stepped up in the last several years to help fan the flames with more than \$3 million in donated services. Working in concert with government partners like OSHA and U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), who annually helps ASSE secure for its awards ceremony its space at the U.S. Capitol, those corporate partners over the years have included the American Red Cross, Bell Helicopter, BP, Citgo, Disney, Genie, KL&P Motivation, Marathon Oil and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. In 2009, donors included Turner Corporation, which donated a luncheon and two buses valued

at \$6,500 so that ASSE could transport poster contest families between its reception at the Department of Labor and its awards ceremony at the Capitol, and Lamar Advertising Company, which donated 10 billboards worth approximately \$1.7 million. Erected in cooperation with the winning children's families in their hometowns, where they were up for an average of four to six weeks, those billboards featured contestants' winning posters along with their names and a special "Celebrate NAOSH Week" message that honored the kids while also promoting ASSE.

"When they get to go to Washington, D.C., and meet with federal officials, it really hits home with the kids the magnitude of what they're doing and shows them that one child really can make a difference," says ASSE member Chuck Wigger, CSP, corporate safety director at Lamar, who spearheaded the company's billboard donations. "Now, with these billboards, they're getting recognition not only from their family and friends, but also from anybody in their communities who recognizes their names — including some of their mayors, who have made local Occupational Safety and Health Professional Day proclamations with these children."

For the kids, the billboards are exciting. But for the people who see them, they could be lifesaving, says Wigger, whose daughter, Caylin, won first place among 5- to 6-year-olds in this year's poster contest for the drawing she submitted of her dad working on a billboard in his safety harness. "There's no way to tell for sure," he says, "but I'd like to think that one of these kids' posters had a positive impact on somebody who saw it."

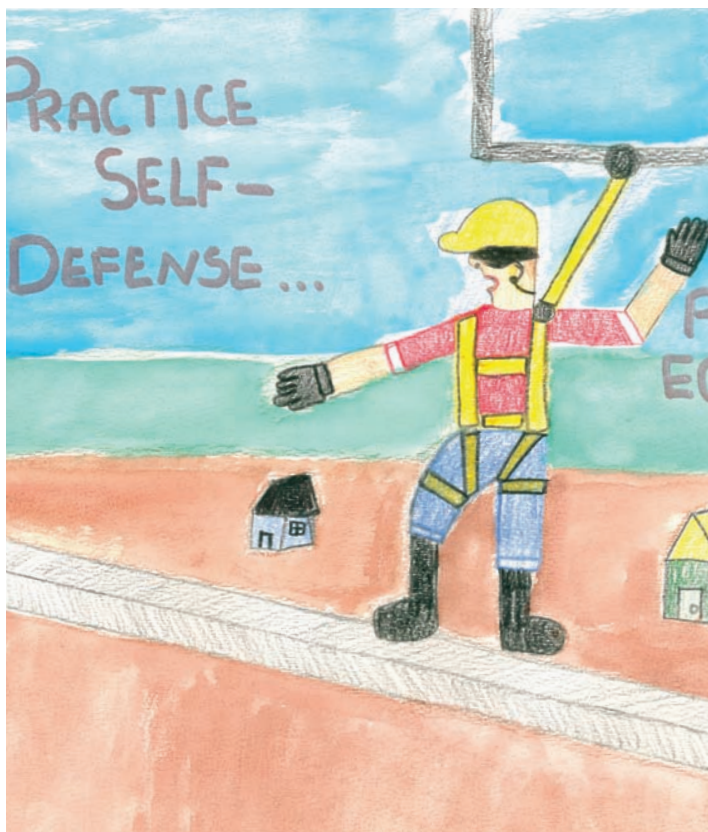
EVERYBODY WINS

That poster contest submissions grew by more than 300 percent in 2008 and that a record number of children and parents attended on their own dime poster contest festivities in D.C. in 2009 — despite rain, the recession and the swine flu scare — says a lot about the positive impact of kids' posters.

That impact starts with the kids themselves, according to former ASSE New Jersey Chapter President Gina Mayer-Costa, CSP, CHMM, who is director of environmental health and safety at Ramapo College of New Jersey in Mahwah, N.J. Because she works with college students, who are already set in their ways, she knows how important it is to engage kids when they're still young enough to internalize safety lessons. That's why her chapter, which has led the society every year with the greatest number of poster contest entries, sends members to local elementary schools to talk about safety and solicit poster entries. It's also why Mayer-Costa, a mother of five, entered her two oldest daughters — one of which was second runner-up in her age group — in ASSE's 2005 poster contest, when they were first old enough to compete.

"I sit down to dinner with my kids every night so that we can talk about our days, and I always talk about safety," Mayer-Costa says. "When the poster contest came out, I thought it was a great way for me to teach them about what I do at work."

Apparently it was, because Mayer-Costa's oldest daughter came home from school after the contest with a homework assignment about what she wanted to be when she grew up. "She said she 'wanted to work in safety and be in ASSE,'" Mayer-Costa wrote to Hurns in an e-mail afterward. "It really made my day and I was so happy and proud that she wanted to be like me."



Created by Valentina Whelan, 11, of Valrico, Fla., who took second place in the 11- to 12-year-old category this year.

As Jeanie Lemens and her daughter, Hayley, can attest, it's not just the contest that influences the kids; it's the entire experience, the best part of which, according to Hayley, was going to Washington, D.C., last May. Although she and her husband didn't have the money, Lemens' father — a former ASSE member — paid for her family to go so that his granddaughter could have that experience.

"It wasn't just getting the savings bonds to help her pay for college," Lemens says. "It was being able to go to Washington, D.C., and receive all this recognition from ASSE and from her community. It made a great impact on our family."

Families like Lemens' collectively spend more than \$100,000 on lodging and transportation every year so that their kids can accept their poster contest awards in D.C. "And when they can't afford it," Hurns says, "our members from all over the country will often donate funds so that they can."

Although the poster contest is a competition, ASSE insists that there be no losers. Even kids who don't win and can't travel to D.C. are therefore recognized and rewarded with a personal thank-you letter from Fortman along with a small gift card.

"When kids get something in the mail, that alone is a pretty big deal," says Morris, whose son displayed Fortman's letter on the bulletin board in his bedroom when he got it. "It was a matter of pride for him. Even though he didn't win the contest, it was cool for him just to get recognized."

It's cool for their parents, too, according to Fortman. "It means the world to the kids," he says, "and if it means the world to the kids, it means the world to their parents — and those are the people we try to represent. It buys us great currency with those safety professionals."

Morris agrees and says the poster contest benefits ASSE members just as much as it does their children. "Children have a stake in their parents' success or failure," he says. "Any time there's an injury or, God help us, a fatality at work, that affects the people who love that person. Our craft deals with something very personal, which is protecting people; kids have a big part to play in keeping their parents safe."

They play an equally large part in keeping their parents' colleagues safe, according to former ASSE President Jack H. Dobson Jr., CSP, who is technical director of Liberty Mutual Group's Wisconsin-based UPS Dedicated Loss Prevention Team. Every year, ASSE creates a winners' poster that combines all the winning kids' entries into a single poster that's distributed to thousands of workplaces worldwide and hung on employee bulletin boards. Dobson, who works with UPS in Wisconsin, puts the poster up at UPS facilities statewide as an ever-present safety reminder for the people that work there.

"One of the reasons I like the approach of using kids is that little kids are just brutally honest," Dobson says. "They really open a lot of eyes because they're not trying to analyze or be politically correct; they're coming up with their honest feelings about how to get Mom and Dad home safe."

Kids are an important ASSE audience not only because they hold sway with their parents, but also because they're future workers and safety professionals. "We need to get the message out to the younger generation that safety is important, and that it's a pretty cool profession, too," Morris says.

Building on that message, the kids' poster contest has catalyzed a number of other ASSE initiatives targeting kids and teens, including a road safety program for teen drivers, a "safety suitcase" program that sends ASSE members to elementary schools for a safety show-and-tell, and even an online video-game, "Don't Be a Zombie at Work" (www.dontbeazombieatwork.org), designed to teach young workers about occupational safety. "Safety can't be an add-on," Fortman says. "It's got to be part of the culture, which is why we're trying to get the safety message in front of kids at a younger age."

At next year's poster contest awards ceremony, that message will be amplified with an appearance by Marvel Comics character Iron Man, who'll talk about superhero safety, and with a special program at the Smithsonian, where kids will learn about safety from exhibits paying tribute to American occupational safety disasters, such as the Hamlet chicken processing plant fire that killed 25 workers in North Carolina in 1991.

"We're not done yet," Morris says. "This program is still growing. The best is yet to come." ■

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THE JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2010 SIGNATURE STORY features the Illinois Psychiatric Society's renewed vigor for advocacy and its legislative successes on behalf of the mentally ill. Eating disorders, telepsychiatry and Medicaid gaps for those starting life outside of prison are among the issues IPS has tackled since hiring its first full-time executive director. IPS, an independent state branch of the American Psychiatric Association, represents approximately 1,100 physician members trained in the treatment of mental illness. IPS has been the voice of psychiatry in Illinois for more than 60 years. For more information, visit www.illinoispsychiatricsociety.org.