

Real winners

A youth group earns national praise for its anti-tobacco work

By Star-Bulletin Staff and News Services

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A Hawaii youth group has received an award for its anti-tobacco education activities.



COURTESY REAL HAWAII

REAL: Hawaii Youth Movement Exposing the Tobacco Industry, Hawaii Program, was named the 2009 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' Tobacco Control Youth Advocate Group of the Year.

Representing the group at an awards gala in Washington, D.C., were Brandon Antonius and Alex Halley of Maui, Michelle Magdirila of Molokai and Courtney Viernes-Silva of Oahu. With them was REAL project coordinator Nicole Sutton.

REAL is a youth-driven anti-tobacco program based on peer-to-peer education and guided by Dr. Cheryl Albright of the Cancer Research

REAL: Hawaii Youth Movement Exposing the Tobacco Industry, Hawaii Program, recently won a national advocacy award, the 2009 Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids' Tobacco Control Youth Advocate Group of the Year. Matthew Myers, left, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, joins REAL Hawaii members Brandon Antonius of Kihei Charter School, Michelle Magdirila of Molokai High School, Courtney Viernes-Silva of Waipahu High School, Alex Halley of Baldwin High School and Barrie Fiske, Tobacco-Free Kids board member, in Washington, D.C.

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Center of Hawaii.

Working through peer-to-peer marketing and grass-roots efforts, the isle youths worked to pass a statewide smoke-free workplace law and advocated for a tobacco tax increase.

The group also supported Food and Drug Administration regulation of tobacco products and the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Antonius, involved with REAL for three years, is a senior at Kihei Charter School. He also is a youth leader for the Tobacco and Alcohol Advertising Survey, which began last fall.

He was a peer trainer for REAL's statewide youth summit last year and has represented REAL at the national level with the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

Antonius and Halley participated in R.J. Reynolds Shareholders' Meeting Protest and Advocacy Youth Training and have met with Hawaii's congressional representatives to discuss tobacco control issues.

Halley, a Baldwin High School sophomore, has been involved with REAL since he was 12. He has been the group's national representative with the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. He served as a trainer for statewide youth summits in 2006 and 2008 and many Kick Butts Day events.

Magdirila, Molokai High senior, has been involved with REAL for three years and served on its statewide leadership team. She is a statewide leader with the Tobacco and Alcohol Advertising Survey.

Viernes-Silva, a junior at Waipahu High School, became a statewide REAL leader while in intermediate school. She was named Youth Adult Tobacco Control Advocate of the Year for 2008 with Geromy Dymally, another REAL youth leader, for leadership and "creative effectiveness" in tobacco control.

She took a lead role in creating "REAL Girl Talk" gatherings where girls take action against tobacco advertising in fashion magazines. She testifies, supports petitions for state tobacco control laws and has helped organize "Youth Unite for Kick Butts Day" events.