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Stressing the positive in drug war

Coalition sets \$2 million goal for East P.A. projects

By S.L. Wykes
Mercury News Staff Writer

As federal officials unveil grand plans to combat drugs on a nationwide basis, a group of East Palo Alto residents plans a smaller scale attack with a more positive bent.

A swimming pool, better playing fields, gardening projects and special counseling are the weapons in East Palo Alto's war on drugs — to be fought with the help of Stanford University, private businesses, citizen volunteers and a coalition of officials from the city government and school district.

While the federal war on drugs comes with a price tag of billions, and concentrates on expanded law enforcement, this East Palo Alto coalition's plan is an estimated \$2 million package that focuses on providing new opportunities and alternatives to drugs.

"It is imperative our young folks learn who they are and what they are by the way they are treated by their families and school peers," said East Palo Alto Mayor Bill Vines. "No lack of money is going to say to us we shouldn't pursue this. We weigh the costs

See DRUG WAR, Page 4B

Coalition forms for East P.A. drug war

DRUG WAR, from Page 1B

against the lives of young people and our own citizens whose lives are being destroyed by this menace."

Part of the program began this summer, with recreation programs at city schools. This month, work will begin on another part: to spruce up all city and school playing fields, with the help of Stanford University staff and students. Stanford athletic department students will also become recreation teachers.

East Palo Alto Planning Commission Chairman Armond Ross said the coalition will ask charitable groups such as the Rotary and Lions clubs to adopt fields and help with maintenance.

Other consultants have already begun a project to identify students in grades four through eight who are at high risk of becoming drug or alcohol users, Ross said. Those students would then receive intensive counseling and be part of special after-school programs. This program has been funded initially by the Pacific Telesis Co., he said.

The city and the Ravenswood School District are negotiating to begin at an East Palo Alto middle

school garden projects that would teach children how to grow vegetables — at the same time enhancing the kids' skills in math, reading and writing, Ross said. That program would have the help of a local vegetable business.

The toughest part of the plan is providing the swimming pool. This could involve restoration of an unused pool at Bell Street Park or the construction of a new pool at one of East Palo Alto's schools, Ross said. The city has no public pool.

If all goes well, all the parts of this project will be in place — including the pool — by next summer, Ross said.

The coalition doesn't know yet where money for all of the project will be found. They're looking at a variety of sources, including trade-offs with developers working with the city on major building projects. But the coalition is pleased with the positive response of the charitable groups, foundations and volunteer professionals they've approached.

"We will make a sincere effort to make sure that our goals for our young people are met," Vines said.