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# Granite Falls finds coalition leader for its fight against drugs

Herald Writer

GRANITE FALLS -- The Granite Falls Community Coalition's new boss, Doug Conger, fit all the major criteria in the anti-drug group's job search:

- He is a 12-year licensed counselor and program manager for the counseling and family support program for the nonprofit Friends of Youth in east King County.
- He knows about running a small business, having had his own real estate company and helping with his wife's bed and breakfast inn.
- He has lived in Granite Falls for four years.

"He got big points because he lives in the community," said Vervia Gabriel, a coalition board member who coordinated the grant through her human resources director job with the Granite Falls School District.

The coalition has been battling Granite Falls' drug problem for several years.

In October, Snohomish County Sheriff Rick Bart credited the organizing efforts by the coalition and other county groups such as Lead on America with helping his deputies shut down 14 residences this year where methamphetamine was either produced or sold.

This fall, the group got a huge boost when it received a \$100,000 grant -- with the possibility of receiving an additional \$350,000 in the next four years -- from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The bulk of that grant, \$75,000, will go to pay the salaries of Conger and a half-time assistant who has yet to be hired. The rest of the money will be spent on supplies, travel and other costs.

Conger will set up a community resource center in a house at 206 N. Alder Ave., across the street from the middle school.

Mayor Lyle Romack bought the two-story house specifically for the coalition's use. Volunteers have been helping refurbish the house.

Conger listed a few priority projects for 2004.

The Communities That Care program will help the coalition develop a drug prevention plan "to help decrease risk factors and enhance protective factors" within the community.

The school district is a major participant in the coalition and already has a nationally accredited, research-based Life Skills drug prevention program in the middle school. Plans for 2004 include expanding it into the upper elementary grades after surveys showed the prevention skills could work for

younger kids, too.

"We also have as one of our major goals this coming year to provide a fully operational community resource center" in the house on Alder Avenue, Conger said.

The house will be a hub for parenting classes, support groups and outpatient mental health counseling, as well as a reference center for housing, medical and food needs, Conger said. Plans for a Web site are in the works, and Conger would like more youth volunteers.

Gabriel said Conger impressed the coalition during his job interview with his vision for how to implement the grant.

"One of the things he talked about was to spend some time meeting community leaders and spend time visiting other community resource centers and start from there," Gabriel said.

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