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Senator pays a visit to Character Counts!

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Students of all ages from Chaves County and the New Mexico Youth Challenge Academy were recognized for following the six pillars of character during the annual Character Counts! recognition program Thursday.

Having paved the way for Character Counts! in Chaves County, U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici made a special appearance during the annual program, where he addressed students, educators, and parents on the importance of education and character.

After describing the six pillars of character, which include trustworthiness, fairness, citizenship, responsibility, caring, and respect, Domenici stated, "I'm convinced that these pillars, when practiced, will build men and women in America of better character."

Stressing the importance of education in today's society, he went on to say, "As you look at our country with the problems we have, although they are many, if we join, hand-by-hand, people who are more responsible because of Character Counts! and Youth Challenge, we give all of America a better chance to succeed."

The veteran lawmaker congratulated those students being recognized for their character during National Character Counts! Week, adding, "After 14 years of success, I look forward to the future accomplishments of this program across the country and especially here in my home state of New Mexico."

Character Counts! groups were formed within the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives in 1994, led by Domenici, who has since supported the program by annually sponsoring a resolution which designates a week in October as National Character Counts! Week.

Executive Director of Character Counts! in Chaves County Cia Avery noted this is Domenici's first visit to the county's Super Celebration Recognition Program. "We were truly honored and gratified to have Sen. Domenici here with us tonight, and his comments were certainly worthy," he said.

Throughout the year, Avery pointed out, students are recognized at various programs, but for National Character Counts! Week, students from preschool through college are invited to submit works in a poetry, art and essay competition.

Students from the New Mexico Youth Challenge Academy and throughout Chaves County were recognized Thursday for their outstanding work. Kindergartner Aliyah Moore, of Valley View Elementary; Maribel Flores, a second-grader at Pecos Elementary; Joseph Martinez, a fifth-grader at Military Heights Elementary; and Dereck White and Adam Villa, of the New Mexico Youth Challenge Academy, received awards for their artwork. Payton Henson, a third-grade student at Hagerman Elementary; Pashense Warford, an eighth-grader at Mountain View Middle; and Jonathan Ray, a 12th-grade student at the New Mexico Youth Challenge Academy, were awarded for their poetry. Jaime Peralta, a third-grader at Hagerman Elementary; Devon Torres, a fourth-grader at Hagerman Elementary; Alyssa Cox, an eighth-grade student at Mountain View Middle; Athena Garcia, a sophomore at Valley Christian Academy; and Cody Shingleton, a 12th-grade student at the New Mexico Youth