

Youth Town Hall 2016



This year students from 22 area high schools attended in record numbers. These students represent the socio-economic diversity found in the Coachella Valley. More than 150 students attended each of four lecture events: January 29, Bill O'Reilly, anchor of the top-rated *The O'Reilly Factor* and best-selling author; February 22, Nando Parrado, survivor of the andes plane crash, March 10, Felipe Calderón, former president of Mexico, and March 24, David Petraeus, a highly decorated general and one of the most prominent combat commanders in American history.

This enriching experience, made possible in large part by donors, enables students to meet these U.S. and world figures up close and personal. In a special reception, before the evening's lecture, they hear from these leaders and ask questions. The remarks by the speaker are candid, and often include advice specifically for the youth.



A great deal of preparation goes into Youth Town Hall on the part of our board of directors, staff and longtime volunteers. Additionally, local personalities meet with the students ahead of the featured speaker to prepare them for the evening's presentation.

Here are some of the students' heartfelt words of gratitude:



“Thank you very much for the opportunity to attend the Desert Town Hall meeting featuring Bill O’Reilly. This experience is one I have deeply cherished, and has been a highlight of my high school career. The books were very generous gifts and very much appreciated.” Madeline D.

“I want to express thanks for the entire event, it was amazing. I have been a fan of Bill O’Reilly for many years and do my best to watch his show, The O’Reilly Factor, daily. Seeing him in person was an experience I will remember forever. His interaction and humbleness impressed me greatly. One part that most impressed me was the education lesson I left with.” Joseph S.

“I wanted to thank you for giving me the opportunity to experience one of the most amazing and inspiring evenings I’ve ever had. Nando Parrado is a person who I will never forget! I was so happy to learn more background about the movie that I watched when I was younger. It inspired me to never give up on my dreams and to keep moving forward no matter what the world throws at me in the future. I will never have enough words to thank Desert Town Hall for giving me a chance at this once in a lifetime experience.” Janae M.



“Thank you so much for the wonderful night and opportunities that you’ve allowed for high school students in the desert and in surrounding areas. I had a great time listening to Nando Parrado and the Chief Justice of California. Parrado’s story was so amazing and uplifting, and it really inspired me personally.” Jacy E.

“I enjoyed both Mr. Calderon and Mr. Petraeus' speeches along with the guest speakers. I felt touched at times upon realizing how far they've come and how much they've been through for the sake of keeping their dreams and living it. All speeches gave me a big idea of how being in the political world and/or having such a risky yet important job for our country's helpful benefits would feel like. I am blessed to have great supporters for our country in America.” Jesus S.



“I want to thank you for allowing me to have the opportunity to attend President Felipe Calderón’s speech. It was a wonderful experience to learn from someone with such extraordinary experiences and knowledge. This has taught me very valuable principles that will benefit my future. I was inspired by Raul Ruiz’s lecture because his story serves as a reminder that my dreams are possible. The most valuable thing I am

taking away from Calderón’s speech is the significance of staying true to one’s principles, regardless of its popularity. Once again, thank you for providing me with this wonderful experience.” Diego V.

“I would like to extend my gratitude for the opportunity to have a meeting and Q&A with General David Petraeus and former CIA agents Susan and Jason Matthews. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet such an influential man in our nation and hear his viewpoints on several controversial topics that plague our nation. I felt honored to be there and left the dinner feeling thoughtful about what it means to be an American citizen. Not only did I get to meet intelligent like-minded young people, but I also got to ponder the thoughts of the wise people who helped shape my country. Thank you so much for this experience.” Lindsey F.

“It was a great pleasure to be able to listen to David Petraeus. I will forever take with me his advice “Exploit every opportunity” and will work on expanding my horizons. In the fall I will be attending UCI studying criminology, and I greatly appreciate hearing perspectives from the CIA. It was a marvelous experience.” Karen M.

Primero Speakers

As you know, we strive each year to enhance the experience of the 600 high school students who attend Youth Town Hall.

Desert Town Hall, presented by The H. N. and Frances C. Berger Foundation, has introduced the Primero Speakers specifically organized for Youth Town Hall (YTH). The Primero Speakers (meaning first) feature the addition of several speakers to the 2016 season who spoke to students of YTH, prior to that evening’s main speaker.

Bill O’Reilly / Friday, January 29

Actress Janine Turner and her daughter, Juliette Turner, a high school student who wrote “Our Constitution Rocks,” talked about why knowing and understanding the U.S. Constitution is vital (Via Google Talk from Dallas.)

Mr. O'Reilly donated and signed 150 of his best-selling kids' books; Ms. Turner provided 150 books and study packages called "Our Constitution Rocks" to Youth Town Hall students.

Nando Parrado / Monday, February 22

Chief Justice of California Tani G. Cantil-Sakauye, a Filipina-American, shared her inspiring story about how she worked her way through community college, college, and law school by waiting tables and working as a blackjack dealer in Lake Tahoe to become the chief justice of the largest court system in the United States.



Felipe Calderon / Thursday, March 10

Congressman Raul Ruiz, California's 36th District. A Mexican-American medical doctor and politician, he has been a member of the United States House of Representatives. He inspired our kids with his story about rising from an immigrant family to the U.S. Congress.

David Petraeus / Thursday, March 24

Jason Matthews, best-selling author of "Red Sparrow" and his wife, Suzanne, are a real-life CIA couple. They worked for 33 years in the CIA, living overseas, stealing secrets for the US government. The spymasters talked about their careers, about what exactly the CIA does, and described some of their past adventures in foreign countries.



Thank you for your participation in this enriching educational experience for our local students. You truly make a difference in their young lives.