

# Tutoring Center to Connect PaliHi and Crenshaw Students

By LAURA WITSENHAUSEN  
Associate Editor

Connecting students who travel to PaliHi from the Crenshaw area of Los Angeles with elementary students in their own neighborhood is the idea behind the Zeitgeist Learning Center, due to open in February.

The center is the brainstorm of two enthusiastic young educators, Jake Phillips and Jennifer Welsh, who want to give students the opportunity to experience one-on-one tutoring, and also to help high school students learn about a career in education.

Key to the program is the use of high school students as tutors. Welsh and Phillips feel the students will be role models to the younger children.

Phillips, 27, is the founder of Brainstorm, a Palisades-based tutoring service, which offers test preparation and tutoring in academic subjects. Since founding Brainstorm two years ago, Phillips wanted to offer a pro bono tutoring service. Welsh, 26, is a doctoral student in education at USC, who grew up in the Palisades, and who also has worked as a tutor through Brainstorm. She had previously taught at Camino Nuevo Elementary Charter Academy in the MacArthur Park neighborhood.

At an information session for Pali students last Friday, the teenagers seemed to pick up on the educators' enthusiasm for the project. Welsh and Phillips are collecting applications for openings at the center in February. Tutors will be chosen based on grades, interest in working with children and extracurricular activities, and will then be interviewed for openings.

The two have also been spending time fundraising. They started off with an initial \$10,000 from Brainstorm, and their proposed yearly operating budget is \$180,000. They currently are being funded through private donations, many from their Palisades clients, and are in the process of gaining their 501(c)3 designation. Once they have a track record, they will begin to apply for grants.

They've also been helped by the



*Zeitgeist Learning Center founders Jake Phillips, center, and Jen Welsh explain the process of becoming a tutor to a Palisades High School student.*

Photo: Laura Witsenhausen

landlord of their 750-sq.-ft. space in a shopping plaza across from Coliseum Elementary School (south of the 10 Freeway between Crenshaw and La Brea), who gave them their first two months free. They anticipate that most of the students using the center at first will be from the elementary school.

During the first month, the tutors will fill PaliHi's community service requirements, and thereafter, the teenage tutors will be paid \$10 an hour. They will work for three hours after school, from 3 to 6 p.m., working for 20-minute periods one-on-one with the students.

From 6 to 7 p.m., tutors will have the opportunity to receive help with their own academic work from Phillips, Welsh or another site supervisor, who will always be on site at the center. "For the large number of students at Pali from Crenshaw, it's a nice opportunity to participate in their

own community," said Phillips. He added that students who live in the Palisades and other local areas have also been interested in tutoring at the center.

The founders hope that the children being tutored will not only improve their skills, but also that the tutors will notice and draw out what the students do best.

Tutors will evaluate the progress of the children based on academic motivation, self-esteem, test scores and grades.

"I think the concept is absolutely wonderful," said Russell Kitigawa, career advisor at Palisades High School. "It gives the kids an opportunity to give back to the neighborhood."

Phillips, a native of South Florida, received a B.S. in economics from Duke University, moved to Los Angeles to act, and became a private tutor. "It's so rewarding," he said. He feels private tutoring should be available to all students.

"I think that everyone should at some point be a teacher. You don't understand how rewarding it is until you've done it."

Welsh graduated from Westlake School and Dartmouth, where she majored in psychology, and then spent a year teaching at an elementary school in Chile where she fell in love with education. She will receive an Ed.D. in K-12 educational leadership in 2006. "We want to engage students not so they can just get As, but also to inspire them to find what they're passionate about," she said.

While starting simply, Welsh and Phillips feel that there is potential to expand the center. Their ideas include using the center for preschool classes, senior learning or nutrition classes during the day-time, thereby utilizing the space at all times, as well as opening similar centers in other neighborhoods.

For more information or to make a donation, contact: 454-9604.