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CONTACT: Phoebe Leung  
PHONE: (209) 558-7116

## Local Youth Think “PHAST” to Protect Health And Slam Tobacco

**Stanislaus County** - More than 70 Stanislaus County youth will travel to Sacramento on Monday to rally against the tobacco industry and promote local tobacco use prevention efforts. The youth are members of PHAST, a countywide youth coalition dedicated to **Protecting Health And Slamming Tobacco**.

PHAST members will be joining hundreds of other youth from around the state for Youth Quest, an annual event organized to empower youth to advocate for a tobacco-free California. The goal of Youth Quest 2007 is to “Turn the Target Around”—to let the tobacco industry know that youth are not willing to be the marketing targets for their deadly product; but instead, the industry will become the target as youth advocates fight to protect the health of kids everywhere.

“Big Tobacco has been after us long enough,” said Alex Torres, the president of the Ceres High School PHAST chapter. “Just because 1,200 of their customers die every day, doesn’t mean that they can trick us into becoming ‘replacement smokers’.”

The Ceres High School PHAST chapter is the largest of the 13 campus chapters that have been organized at high schools throughout Stanislaus County. These chapters form the countywide PHAST coalition, with a combined membership of more than 150 students. They conduct tobacco education activities to their peers, and provide the resources which our youth needs to avoid being targeted by the tobacco industry.

“We’ve been working hard all year to fight back against the tobacco industry,” said Callie Keyes, a member of Waterford High School PHAST chapter. “It’s exciting to have this opportunity to take our work to the next level and have our voices heard across the state. Big Tobacco may act tough but when youth speak up, everyone listens.”

Keyes was selected from a pool of statewide applicants to be a keynote speaker at a press conference to be held on the West Steps of the State Capitol, on Monday at 1:30 p.m. Before the press conference, Youth Quest participants will participate in a legislative training session led by the California Youth Advocacy Network who is also the host of this annual event. PHAST members will also have the opportunity to meet with Senator Jeff Denham and share information about their accomplishments and the importance of youth leadership in health advocacy.

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“With more than 90% of tobacco users starting the addictive habit before the age of 18, this program aims at the very heart of the issue,” said Ken Fitzgerald, the tobacco control project director with the Health Services Agency. “Youth are being targeted now as much as they ever have, and groups like PHAST are a key element in keeping future generations out of the tobacco industry’s reach.”

PHAST is a partnership project of the Stanislaus County Health Services Agency Tobacco Education Program and the Stanislaus County Office of Education



Tobacco Use Prevention and Education (TUPE) program. With limited resources available for tobacco education and outreach, the collaboration between the two agencies has helped to facilitate the success of PHAST. HSA and SCOE are funded by state tobacco tax grants from the California Department of Health Services and the California Department of Education.

“Effective partnerships and a commitment to youth are key to the success of PHAST, and the dedication of the chapter advisors, their schools and our community partners are proof positive,” said Charmaine Monte, TUPE coordinator at the Stanislaus County Office of Education. “But the greatest achievements of this coalition are thanks to the solid commitment, enthusiasm and talents of the youth.”

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