

MONROE CHALLENGE LEADS TO 'OPRAH' VISIT

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It's hard enough for most teens to open up about issues such as racism and peer pressure. Try doing it in front of cameras from The Oprah Winfrey Show.

That was the challenge facing students at Monroe High School, who will be featured tomorrow on Oprah as part of a show on Challenge Day, a national nonprofit organization that conducts programs intended to help young people break down barriers between each other.

The show will air at 4 p.m. on WTOL-TV, Channel 11.

Monroe High School hosted a Challenge Day event on Sept. 29, when Oprah's cameras - though not the talk-show host herself - were present to see the program in action.

"It was very nerve-wracking," said Jessica Maniaci, a senior at the high school. "In the very beginning, everyone was just paying more attention to the cameras than everyone else."

But eventually people opened up and started tackling some heavy issues.

"It was tough seeing all the people breaking down and just really opening up to you and stuff," said Darren Chappell, a senior.

Started in 1987 by a California couple, Challenge Day involves a series of exercises to help students understand that other people wrestle with the same problems and feelings that they do. About 65 juniors and seniors from Monroe High School who participated represented all sorts of social groups: jocks, preps, ethnic minorities, and more, said Denise Lilly, assistant principal.

Oprah brought in each of the students, as well as parents and adult participants from the school, for the show's taping in Chicago last month, she said.

Lilly said she feels good about what the country will see about the school.

"We're just like any high school across the country. Teenagers have challenges that they face daily," she said. "We are taking the initiative and doing something about it."

A free viewing of tomorrow's program will be hosted at the Maumee Indoor Theatre, 601 Conant St., Maumee, according to Amy Clark, secretary for the Spring Green Educational Foundation, which helps fund Challenge Day events locally. Doors open at 3:30 p.m.

She said the program is in 17 schools in Lucas and Wood counties in Ohio and Monroe County in Michigan.

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