THE STORY OF RED RIBBON WEEK



For nearly 30 years, Red Ribbon Week has been used by educators and community leaders to teach children and youth an important lesson: Say no to drugs, say yes to healthy lifestyles. Today, approximately 100,000 schools and organizations across the United States participate in the event the last week of October.

Red Ribbon Week came into existence out of the tragic death of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena. Camarena was a former U.S. Marine and law enforcement officer for the Calexico, California, police department. He joined the DEA in 1977.



Special Agent Enrique Camarena

After three years, he was transferred to Mexico, where he was on the trail of one of the country's biggest marijuana and cocaine traffickers. One day in early 1985, as Camarena left his office to meet his wife for lunch, a group of five men surrounded him, shoved him into a car, and sped away. His body was found a month later. He was 37 years old.

Shortly after Camarena's death, California Congressman Duncan Hunter and high school friend Henry Lozano organized "Camarena Clubs" in the Calexico area. Hundreds of club members began wearing red ribbons and pledged to lead drug-free lives in honor of Camarena and others who had made sacrifices in the anti-drug effort.

The red ribbon movement gained momentum in California and spread across the country. Parent groups in California, Illinois, and Virginia began promoting the wearing of red ribbons during late October. In 1988, the U.S. Congress designated the last week of October as Red Ribbon Week. President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan served as honorary chairpersons for the initial Red Ribbon Week, which was sponsored by the National Family Partnership.

More than 80 million Americans now join in Red Ribbon Week activities each year, ranging from classroom events to stadium-sized rallies. The red ribbon continues to be a potent symbol in the effort to combat drug abuse across our nation.



First Lady Nancy Reagan