

## Former prisoner shares his telling tale, an innocent man sitting on Death Row

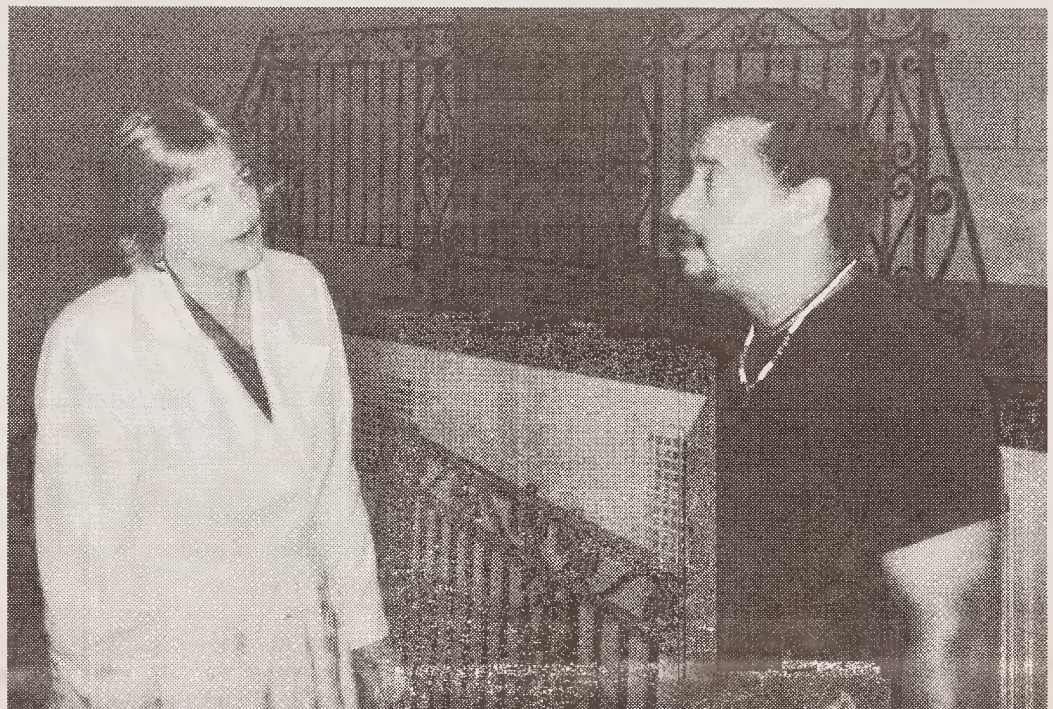
BY BLAIR BLOOMQUIST  
 Staff Writer

On Thursday, November 1, wrongfully accused Juan Melendez arrived on campus to share the story of his 18-year incarceration in Florida. Melendez was convicted in 1984 for the murder of cosmetology school owner Delbert Baker. Although there was no physical evidence connecting Melendez to the crime and the witnesses of the trial were deemed questionable, Melendez was found guilty of both armed robbery and first-degree murder.

Throughout his 17 years, eight months, and one day in jail, Melendez experienced a full gamut of emotions including hatred, fear, enragement, and betrayal. Although most of his experiences during incarceration were not positive, he believes that if he had never entered jail, he probably would not have learned to read, write, or speak English as well as he does now. He attributes

his gained knowledge to his friends who grew to be family members to him. He also attributes his will to live to those people who taught him how to love and show compassion. During his time in jail, Melendez witnessed many of his friends end their own lives, as they believed "the only way to escape was to commit suicide." However, Melendez was able to maintain his own sanity because of his "beautiful dreams" and letters of encouragement from his mother and pen pals across the nation.

Witnessing unfair racial treatment towards his fellow jail mates was the most devastating and hopeless situation Melendez experienced. One such instance occurred when a fellow inmate needed emergency medical assistance, yet none of the guards answered his pleas for help. Consequently, Melendez performed CPR on his friend while the guard stood idly by. As his friend died in his arms, he felt more hatred and anger towards



Medical careers teacher Lisa Stewart talks with Juan Melendez regarding her experience as a prison nurse. Melendez has traveled nationwide to speak with high school students and proclaim his views against capital punishment.

the prison staff than he had ever experienced in his life.

"I truly believe I was saved by the grace of God, in spite of the system," said Melendez of his release from Death Row.

Although Melendez was both thrilled and relieved

to be acquitted, he also felt sadness since he was leaving his friends behind. When departing, he told his cellmates to keep faith and to fight for their rights. Even though almost 18 years of his life were spent in jail, Melendez understands

imperfections in the judicial system cannot always be erased.

"Law is made by human beings, carried out by human beings. We are human beings, and we make mistakes as well," said Melendez at the end of the presentation.

## Student activists travel to Capitol Hill

BY RACHEL WEINSTOCK  
 Executive Copy Editor

Global warming has become an increasingly discussed and debated issue in recent years. Thirty-two students and four chaperones attended the Power Shift 2007 conference to unite with fellow youth environmentalists and try to make a difference in Washington D.C., from Nov. 2-5. Chaperones were social studies teachers Joe Hill and Jennie Enright, Spanish teacher "Profe" Jade Dickerson, and former graduate and parent

of freshman Caroline Smith, Mrs. Smith.

"[Power Shift's goal is] to overcome the challenges of the 21st century, build a clean energy economy, achieve energy independence, create millions of green jobs, increase global equity, and revitalize the American economy," states its website.

Sophomore Shelby Stoneking helped organize the trip. She heard about the conference from her sister, who was working with Power Shift as a campus coordinator.

Grimsley was the only high school represented from the 5,500 participants.

"Most attendees were in college or has just graduated from college and lived in all 50 states and even Puerto Rico," said sophomore Isabel Chasse, who heard about the trip through her AP Government class.

Participants attended informational seminars and lobbied their respective congressmen.

"At the conference, we heard key speakers and attended panels and workshops. These were similar

to college classes and really got you involved," said Stoneking.

Power Shift featured numerous well-known speakers, including politician Ralph Nader and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi.

"Most of the speakers there were famous, such as Julia 'Judy' Bonds, born and raised in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia, a coal miner's daughter and the director of Coal River Mountain Watch; Bill McKibben, a writer and activist on global warming; and Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Jr. a minister, community activist, and one of the most influential people in Hip-Hop political life," said senior Lily Proctor.

Another important aspect of the conference was learning how to educate others about the devastating effects

of global warming and what to do in order to stop it.

"A lot of the conference was learning how to plan things on your home campus, such as rallies and demonstrations, so we can work on making a difference all around the world," said Stoneking.

Proctor has already taken these messages to heart. Last year, she started the "Acting to Conserve the Environment Club," also known as A.C.E. Through this organization, Proctor hopes to promote environmental conservation at school, such as encouraging students to recycle plastic bottles from their lunches.

College and high school-aged students are not the only people who are actively working to help the environment.

(cont. on page 2)

**opinion**

**Point Counterpoint:  
 Can females govern  
 as well as men?**

page 5

**features**

**Teen interest in news  
 articles wavers, as do  
 their media choices**

page 15

**sports**

**Martineau advances  
 male soccer team  
 with superior goals**

page 18