

# Red Ribbon Week History

## Why We Celebrate Red Ribbon Week

### Kiki and the History of Red Ribbon Week

Enrique (Kiki) S. Camarena was born on July 26, 1947 in Mexicali, Mexico. He graduated from Calexico High School in Calexico, California in 1966, and in 1968 he joined the U.S. Marine Corps. After serving in the Marine Corps for two years, he joined the Calexico Police Department as a Criminal Investigator in 1970. In May of 1973, Kiki started working as a Narcotics Investigator with the El Centro Police Department.



He stayed with the El Centro P.D. until June 28, 1974 when he joined the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). His first assignment as a Special Agent with DEA was in a familiar place - Calexico, California. In 1977, after three years in Calexico, he was reassigned to the Fresno District Office in Northern California. Four years later, Kiki received transfer orders to Mexico, where he would work out of the Guadalajara Resident Office. For four and one-half years in Mexico, Kiki remained on the trail of the country's biggest marijuana and cocaine traffickers. And in early 1985, he was extremely close to unlocking a multi-billion dollar drug pipeline. However, before he was able to expose the drug trafficking operations to the public, he was kidnapped on February 7, 1985. On that fateful day, while headed to a luncheon with his wife, Mika, Kiki was surrounded by five armed men who threw him into a car and sped away. That was the last time anyone but his kidnappers would see him alive.



It is believed that Special Agent Camarena's death actually occurred two days later, but his body was not discovered until March 5, 1985. He was 37 years old and was survived by his wife, Mika and their three children, Enrique, Daniel and Erik. During his 11 years with DEA, Kiki received two Sustained Superior Performance Awards, a Special Achievement Award and, posthumously, the Administrator's Award of Honor, the highest award granted by DEA.

Shortly after Kiki's death, Congressman, Duncan Hunter, and high school friend Henry Lozano launched Camarena Clubs in Kiki's hometown of Calexico, California. Hundreds of club members including Calexico High School teacher David Chillon wore red ribbons and pledged to lead drug-free lives to honor the sacrifices made by Kiki Camarena and



others on behalf of all Americans.

Red Ribbon Week eventually gained momentum throughout California and later the United States. In 1985, club members presented the "Camarena Club Proclamation" to then First Lady Nancy Reagan, bringing it national attention. Later that summer, parent groups in California, Illinois, and Virginia began promoting the wearing of Red Ribbons nationwide during late October. The campaign was then formalized in 1988 with President and Mrs. Reagan serving as honorary chairpersons. Today, the eight-day celebration is sponsored by the National Family Partnership (previously known as the Federation of Parents for Drug Free Youth), and has become the annual catalyst to show intolerance for drugs in our schools, work places, and communities. Each year, during the last week in October, more than 80 million young people and adults show their commitment to a healthy, drug-free life by wearing or displaying the Red Ribbon.

Red Ribbon Week history dates back to the late 1980s and has evolved into one of the most recognized drug prevention campaigns in the United States. This annual event, celebrated in schools and communities across the nation, aims to raise awareness about the dangers of drug abuse and to promote a drug-free lifestyle among youth. Understanding the origins of Red Ribbon Week helps to appreciate its significance and the ongoing efforts to combat substance abuse.

# Origins of Red Ribbon Week

## The Birth of the Campaign

The history of Red Ribbon Week began in 1985, following the tragic murder of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena. Camarena, dedicated to fighting drug trafficking, was kidnapped and killed by drug traffickers in Mexico. His death shocked the nation and highlighted the dangers associated with drug abuse and trafficking.

In 1986, in honor of Camarena's memory and as a tribute to his work, individuals in Camarena's hometown of Calexico, California, began wearing red ribbons as a symbol of their commitment to a drug-free lifestyle. The red ribbon soon became a national symbol of anti-drug awareness.

## Expansion of the Campaign

As the movement gained momentum, the National Family Partnership (NFP), a nonprofit organization, took the initiative to promote Red Ribbon Week as a national event. In 1988, the first National Red Ribbon Week was celebrated, and it has been observed annually ever since. The NFP encourages schools, communities, and organizations to participate in various activities to educate and promote drug prevention.

## Purpose and Objectives of Red Ribbon Week

Red Ribbon Week serves several purposes, which include:

- Raising awareness about the dangers of drug abuse.

- Encouraging healthy lifestyles and drug-free choices among youth.
- Promoting community involvement in drug prevention efforts.
- Honoring the memory of those who have lost their lives to drug-related issues.

## **Key Messages of Red Ribbon Week**

The campaign emphasizes the importance of making informed choices and understanding the consequences of drug use. Key messages include:

- Say no to drugs and alcohol.
- Make healthy choices that lead to a fulfilling life.
- Support friends and family in their commitment to a drug-free life.
- Educate others about the risks and dangers associated with substance abuse.

## **How Red Ribbon Week is Celebrated**

### **Activities and Events**

Red Ribbon Week is celebrated in various ways, with schools and communities organizing events throughout the week. Common activities include:

1. **Themed Days:** Schools often designate specific days with themes such as "Wear Red Day," "Team Up Against Drugs," and "Put a Cap on Drugs," where students and staff participate by dressing according to the themes.
2. **Educational Programs:** Many schools host assemblies, workshops, and presentations that educate students about the dangers of drug abuse and the importance of making healthy choices.
3. **Community Events:** Towns and cities may organize parades, rallies, and community service projects, involving families and local organizations to raise awareness and show support for the cause.
4. **Art and Essay Contests:** Schools often hold contests where students can express their thoughts about drug prevention through art and writing, fostering creativity and critical thinking.

## **Involvement of Parents and Community**

The success of Red Ribbon Week relies on the active participation of parents, educators, and community members. Parents are encouraged to engage in conversations with their children about drug use, reinforcing the messages learned at school. Community members can volunteer for events, donate resources, or share their own stories related to substance abuse, thereby fostering a supportive environment for drug prevention.

## **The Impact of Red Ribbon Week**

## Statistics and Research

Research has shown that campaigns like Red Ribbon Week can have a positive impact on youth attitudes toward drug use. According to studies conducted by the NFP, schools that actively participate in Red Ribbon Week report:

- Increased awareness of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.
- Stronger community ties and support networks.
- Improved student engagement in drug prevention programs.

Moreover, ongoing efforts have indicated a decrease in drug use among adolescents in communities that emphasize drug education and prevention.

## Long-Term Goals of the Campaign

Red Ribbon Week aims to create lasting change in attitudes toward drug use. The long-term goals include:

- Continued education and awareness about substance abuse prevention.
- Promotion of healthy lifestyle choices among youth.
- Encouragement of community collaboration in drug prevention initiatives.

# Conclusion

The Red Ribbon Week history is a powerful reminder of the impact of community action and awareness in the fight against drug abuse. From its inception as a tribute to a fallen hero to its current status as a national campaign, Red Ribbon Week continues to inspire individuals and communities to take a stand against drugs. As we observe this week each year, it is vital to reflect on its significance, engage in meaningful activities, and foster a culture of support and education around drug prevention. By working together, we can create a safer, healthier future for our youth and communities.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is Red Ribbon Week?

Red Ribbon Week is an annual event in the United States that promotes drug awareness and prevention, typically held in the last week of October.

### When did Red Ribbon Week start?

Red Ribbon Week began in 1985 in honor of Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Agent Enrique 'Kiki' Camarena, who was killed by drug traffickers in Mexico.

### Why is the red ribbon used as a symbol?

The red ribbon symbolizes a commitment to living a drug-free life, and it serves as a tribute to those who have lost their lives due to drug-related violence.

### How did Red Ribbon Week gain national recognition?

In 1988, the U.S. Congress officially proclaimed the last week of October as 'National Red Ribbon Week,' helping to promote its significance on a larger scale.

## **What are common activities during Red Ribbon Week?**

Common activities include wearing red ribbons, participating in educational programs, organizing community events, and engaging in discussions about the dangers of drug use.

## **Who can participate in Red Ribbon Week?**

Red Ribbon Week is open to everyone, including schools, community organizations, families, and individuals who want to promote drug prevention and awareness.

## **What themes are often highlighted during Red Ribbon Week?**

Themes may include the importance of making healthy choices, the dangers of substance abuse, and the benefits of living a drug-free lifestyle.

## **Are there any educational resources available for Red Ribbon Week?**

Yes, many organizations provide educational resources, including lesson plans, activities, and promotional materials to help schools and communities engage with the message of Red Ribbon Week.

## **How has Red Ribbon Week evolved over the years?**

Red Ribbon Week has evolved to include a wider range of topics beyond just drug prevention, focusing on overall health and wellness, mental health awareness, and bullying prevention.

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