

Coronado teacher delivers smooth rhymes along with friend in Big Beat Battalion

By JADE VAKILZADEH

R-JENERATION

Kids often rustle potential careers such as ballerina or crime scene investigator through their dreamy heads a million times as they grow into adulthood.

Jeff Johnson, a Coronado High School teacher, was different. When he was 13, Johnson made a crucial decision. He wanted to affect kids' lives, and he set his heart on becoming a teacher.

"I coached my first soccer team when I was in sixth grade and the boys and girls were in third grade, and I realized I had an impact on them," Johnson says. From there, Johnson worked at recreation centers throughout high school and coached soccer during his college years. Although he loved motivating his soccer players, he still wanted to fulfill his first dream of motivating students as a teacher, and combining teaching with his love of U.S. history and government that had played a role in his life since he was a young boy.

Throughout his 12 years of teaching, Johnson paired his love of history with motivation and comedy to encourage his students to do their best in and out of the classroom.

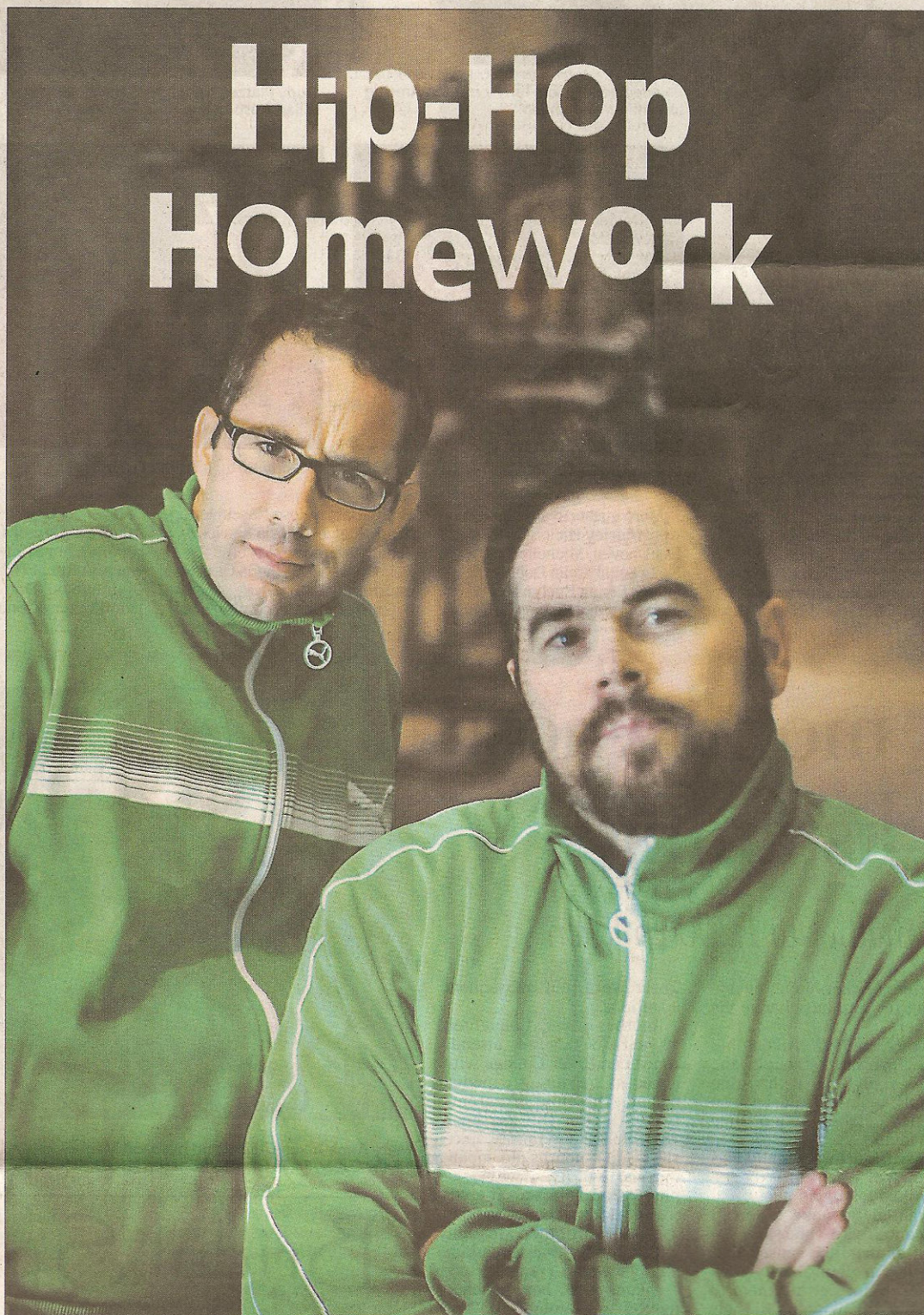
"I love when Mr. Johnson describes President Andrew Jackson as the 'Chuck Norris of his time.' It always cracks me up. Plus, comparing an older historical figure to a person we all know about makes history way more fun and easy," says Kaylee Zentai, a sophomore at Coronado and a student in Johnson's advanced placement U.S. history class.

Even Johnson's room motivates students with his favorite things.

"Star Wars" memorabilia and Yoda figures cover some walls. Black-and-white photographs of activists and legends blanket others. American flags come in different forms all over the room, particularly in curtain form in a corner.

Unlike some teachers, Johnson trains his students to think critically. He wants his students to be well-informed and make their own decisions, not just agree with everyone around them. The history teacher wants critical thinking to be a permanent aspect in his students' lives once they leave the classroom.

"I don't want to tell you how to think, but I want you to think," says Johnson, who along with teaching



Jeff Johnson, aka Smooth J, and Tyler Leavitt, also known as Grammar G, make up the hip-hop duo Big Beat Battalion.

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history and government, coaches Coronado junior varsity soccer. "I want you to critically inform the world around you. A teacher's job is to teach a student about life through whatever class they're in."

In his spare time, Johnson enjoys rapping and freestyling with his best friend from childhood, Tyler Leavitt, in their group, Big Beat Battalion.

"He used to beat-box in the back of the bus and I would freestyle in ninth grade," Johnson, or Smooth J as he's known in Big Beat, says of the group's origins.

Over time, the duo recorded

more music on software and began performing live. Today, they have released three CDs and have played shows with bands such as Shiny Toy Guns and the Ting Tings. During the Hip Hop for Hearts fundraiser at Coronado, Big Beat helped put together a hip-hop show that raised \$5,000 for little kids to have a good holiday experience.

To enjoy himself, Johnson also likes to hang out with his wife and cat, and watch University of Nevada, Las Vegas basketball, considering himself a big Rebels fan.

Johnson believes the spirit and

energy of his students keep him going. He has the same goal as he did when he was 13 and coaching his first soccer team. He wants to influence people and have them go off into the world as better individuals. The impact and lesson is important to him.

"Every year there's a new crop," Johnson says. "That's what's so fun about being a schoolteacher. Kids keep you young and keep you vibrant. It's about touching people's lives. If I can help two students a day, or even a week, I am happy with who I am."