



Saint Viator Students Given a Grim Reminder of Driving Dangers



Students received a visual reminder of the dangers of distracted driving when they saw 42 of their classmates lying on the floor under white sheets.

Students lying on the gym floor, draped in white sheets and behind a police barrier provided a grim background for an assembly last week at Saint Viator High School in Arlington Heights.

There were 42 students to be exact, equaling the average number of teens killed over a weekend in car accidents, or 14 per day.

“We can spit out all the stats you want,” says senior Richard McLoughlin of Prospect Heights, one of four leaders of the school’s Teen Safe Driving Campaign. “But when you see your friends lying under a white sheet, you get the full effect.”

McLoughlin and his classmates figured a “grim reaper” day at the school might bring home their point about the dangers of using excessive

speed, not wearing seatbelts, impaired driving and, most importantly, driving while texting.

“We’re just trying to heighten awareness of the consequences,” added senior Christine Julius of Arlington Heights.

Walter Sheldon, an Allstate agent with offices in Palatine and Glenview, noted that driver error, caused by distractions and speeding, account for the number one cause of teenage crashes.

“Texting while driving appears to be a deadly distraction,” Sheldon said at the assembly. “Research has shown that texting while driving is 23 times more likely to lead to crashes.”

He added that the riskiest time for teen accidents is at night, when driving to and from school, and while driving other teens in the car.

“With our students coming from so far away, and spending so much time in the car, we felt this was an important message to deliver,” said Rose Ruffatto, co-moderator.

The safe driving campaign started in December when the school received a grant from the state’s Operation Safe Driving Program, co-sponsored by the Illinois Department of Transportation, Allstate and Ford Motor Company.

Saint Viator student leaders called their campaign, “Distractions, Slow Reactions,” and they set out to immerse classmates in weekly statistics, posters and preventive methods.

“You never going to think it’s going to be a student you know, until it happens,” said senior Erick Diaz of Bensenville, who lost a former classmate from Driscoll Academy, Pierre Washington-Steele, to a car accident, last month.

Diaz and the other leaders documented their entire campaign in a PowerPoint presentation for IDOT officials. They added the final piece at last weekend’s turnabout dance, when students made a pledge by signing the bottom of their ticket stub.

“Texting while driving is not for me,” they said. “I pledge to drive TEXT FREE.”