



School Officials Bring Shocking Approach to Alcohol Awareness

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Maggie Kern of Barrington loses control of the driving simulator car. (Photo by Chris Santucci '12)

As students at Saint Viator head into prom season, school officials send a harsh reminder of the hazards of drinking and driving.

On Tuesday, the students filed into the Cahill Gymnasium for a presentation by the Save a Life Tour.

Through the use of tragic videos, personal stories, and a drinking and driving simulation experience, the Save a Life Tour brings a shocking approach to alcohol awareness to colleges, universities and high schools across the country.

“The only way to fight drunk driving is through awareness,” said Matt Kwant, a drunk-driving accident survivor and one of the Save a Life Tour presenters.

“Everyone knows drinking and driving is bad,” Kwant continued. “However, America has made it cool. This program is important because it is a re-education of the mind. We aren’t just giving stats; we are showing real people and real consequences.”

One real-life experience came from Jeremiah Newson, the other tour presenter. He was the driver in a drunk-driving accident that ultimately left his two friends paralyzed for life.

“I didn’t understand why I was spared,” Newson said. “Why my two friends were going to be in a wheelchair for the rest of their lives when I was the one driving.”

The video presentation showed graphic images of drunk-driving accidents. Severed bodies laying in the street, a victim that was so disfigured she was unrecognizable, and a drunk driver getting his head stapled were among the visuals students encountered. These disturbing images got the attention of the students. Several turned their heads, while others cringed and vocally expressed their discomfort.

Junior Grace Donnelly, 16, of Inverness was affected by the presentation. “Parts of the video were hard to watch, but it was very informative,” Donnelly commented. “I think [Newson’s] story had more of an impact since it was an actual person telling us about his experience, rather than just seeing it through a video. It definitely makes you think about the consequences of your decisions.”

Throughout the rest of the day, students were encouraged to try the driving simulator. The simulator gives a graduated perspective of the effects of driving while intoxicated. It starts the driver out with a blood alcohol concentration of 0.0 and increases every 20 seconds until it reaches .30.

“Our simulator goes to the .3 level, because last year, 15,000 people were pulled over at that limit,” said Kwant. “At this level, a person can’t walk or see straight – let alone drive a car.”

“Students often times feel like they are invincible,” said Rose Ruffatto, co-moderator of SADD. “We hope that such an in-your-face approach really drives home the point that accidents can happen to anyone of us.”