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Just don't do it

Judges tell teens why they should leave the party

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You could hear a pin drop in the Sacred Heart-Griffin High School auditorium Jan. 25.

Moments earlier, it had been a boisterous crowd, still on a lunch-fueled high. But when the photographs of a pretty, young woman flashing on a screen in front of them morphed into gruesome images of an unrecognizable girl — the result of an accident involving a drunk driver — the mood quickly grew somber.

It was a climactic ending to an otherwise lighthearted (yet serious) anti-drug/anti-alcohol presentation two Illinois judges are taking across the state to warn teens about the ramifications of drinking underage and illegal drug use.

“We hope to give them seven reasons to get their friends out of the party,” Judge Mark Drummond, of the 8th judicial circuit, said before the presentation. “Because at this point in their life, the people that will have the most influence on their lives is their peers.”

Drummond told the teens that the 50-minute presentation, launched by the Illinois Judges Association in September 2007, is their attempt at “preventative law.” Too often, he said, the teens who stand before him in court are there because they didn’t understand the short- and long-term ramifications of a dumb decision.

So he and Judge Mark Schuering, also of the 8th judicial circuit, developed seven reasons teens should reconsider staying at a party where the attendees are up to no good and offered real-life examples of Illinois teens who learned the hard way.

REASON 1: DEATH

Telling teens that something could kill them isn’t always effective, Drummond acknowledged, yet he offers it as a reason for those few who are “impressed by death.”

“The longest visitation lines you ever have to stand in are for two groups of people — teachers and high school students,” he said, adding that he wishes peers would show their friends that kind of support before the behavior that led to their death.

REASON 2: A CRIMINAL RECORD

There is a misconception that a juvenile record won’t follow someone into adulthood. With

more and more circuit clerks posting juvenile records on the Internet, a future employer who does an Internet search may stumble across it someday and decide against hiring you.

REASON 3: NO TRUST

You don't want to lose it — period, Drummond said. Life's much easier when your parents trust you.

REASON 4: NO TIME

All the time you'll spend in court, on probation, filing paperwork, etc., is all "time you could be doing things you'd rather be doing," Drummond said.

REASON 5: NO PRIVACY

Did you know you have to pee in front of an officer if you are accused of taking drugs?

REASON 6: NO MONEY

Drinking illegally can cost serious money — about \$500 per beer. That's \$3,000 per six-pack.

"Just wait til you're 21," Drummond said. "It's a lot cheaper."

REASON 7: NO CAR

Illinois has a zero-tolerance law for minors. If you are busted for any alcohol-related offense, you automatically lose your license for a year, even if a car wasn't involved.

Drummond concluded the presentation with a contract the teens could take home to sign with their parents that states if a teen ends up at the wrong place at the wrong time and needs a way out, he or she can call home for a ride and a parent will pick him or her up — no questions asked. He has a similar contract with his own three kids.

"The thought being," he said, "we'd rather have the child alive than give them another lecture."

While some teens said they thought the contract idea was a good one, others said it would depend on the parent-teen relationship.

"I think it's a good idea if the parents and teenagers agree," said SHG senior Emily Fletcher. "It's a good way to prevent something like a catastrophe from happening, but I'm not sure all parents with teens would agree."

A.J. Ward, a junior, said the contract seemed like an "odd thing to do" and wasn't sure too many parents would sign it. What he was sure of, however, was the importance the role of friends have on a teen's decision to do right or wrong.

"I think in a lot of situations it's one of the most important roles," he said. "As much as an individual everyone is, they still rely on their friends a lot."

Corbin Mapes, a freshman, said most teens already have made the decision about whether to drink or do drugs. But if they have friends who have made the decision not to do those things, their positive influence can make the difference.

All three teens said the most convincing part of the program were the images at the end of

the presentation showing Jacqueline Saburido, a 20-year-old from Texas who was injured and burned to the point of being unrecognizable because of a drunk driver.

Emily said it made her understand that there are some consequences that result from drunk driving many teens don't realize.

"It doesn't kill every time," she said, "but think of all the suffering that can come from it."

Kelsea Gurski can be reached at 788-1526.

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great program wrote at 2/15/2008 9:12:35 AM

What a great proactive program! Unfortunately, Illinois' no-tolerance laws don't always apply fairly and equally. If parents are wealthy enough and/or negligent enough to get their underage drivers attorneys, these teenage drivers can slide right on through with only a slap on the hand. Within 2-3 months not only do they have their licenses back, but a new car to boot.

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