



A sobering ride

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Geysbeek unveiled his high tech drunken driving simulator to the student body yesterday to show local teens how drinking alcohol affects one's reaction times, and through a film presentation showed them the gruesome reality that can result from the seemingly harmless act of getting behind the wheel after a few beers.

The intent of the film was to give students a glimpse of what can happen if you drink and drive, from being pulled over for a field sobriety test, to paying the ultimate price with your life or perhaps the lives of innocents.

Set to dramatic music, the film depicted a mother collapsing by the bedside of her son, who lay bloodied and unrecognizable. Victims of a drunken driving accident obscured inside body bags lay alongside their mangled vehicle. Photographs of a beautiful young girl give way to photographs of her horribly disfigured and burned body — the sole surviving passenger of a car driven by a friend who was drunk.

These were the images Geysbeek and the Beacon Coalition, who sponsored the event with Michael's Harborside and Rochester Electronics, wanted the kids to take with them so that in the future they might take action to prevent such a horrific reality. Students attending the assembly took in more than just the movie screen and drunken driving simulator. A single white casket stood off to the side of the gymnasium, which made the images on screen that much more effective.

"I've never driven drunk, but it definitely put it in perspective for me," senior Abby Casey said. "It was really difficult to watch."

Casey said she was especially moved by the story Geysbeek told of a best friend he'd watched die after being struck on his motorcycle by a drunken driver. Geysbeek described how it changed his attitude toward drinking and driving, and how it caused him to reflect on all the times he'd taken his life for granted, along with the lives of friends riding along with him as passengers through his early manhood.

"We all have best friends," Casey said. "You really can't take back the loss of your best friend."

Speaking of the tragic story of Angelique, the teen disfigured from an accident in which she was a passenger, Casey considered how the teen driving the car must have felt having lived through the accident.

"That kind of guilt — I don't think I could live with that," she said.

Casey was one of the first to try the drunken driving simulator, which looked a lot like a souped-up video game portal, with a main screen and two side screens representing side view mirrors. Geysbeek explained to the seniors waiting for their turn, that just like alcohol slows down one's reaction time, any action they took

with the simulator would be delayed according to their blood alcohol level, measured in 11 different levels.

Despite those warnings, Casey found it incredibly hard to avoid her body's natural instinct to overcompensate and force a turn.

"It was really hard to do and the longer I did it, I kept getting more frustrated and making more mistakes," Casey said. "I couldn't imagine trying to drive like that."

Still, Geysbeek explained most fatal drunken driving accidents occur not as a result of swerving, but as a result of a drunken driver's tunnel vision. Impaired drivers are so intent on not swerving, he said, they become victims to focusing too hard on what's in front of them and miss what's coming up beside them.

"You forget about everything else," Geysbeek said.

Senior Ryan Casey wasn't prepared for how the slowed reaction time would affect his abilities.

"It was very hard to do," he said. "Everything became a lot harder to deal with. If it's going to be that hard, I couldn't imagine driving like that."

Ryan was additionally moved by the film, which he characterized as "graphic."

"It was really graphic, but I think necessary to show seniors how drinking and driving can be."

Senior Kit Dyer, who was standing in line waiting for a turn on the simulator, didn't so much agree with what she described as "scare tactics" inserted into the film — dramatic music played against images meant to shock. But Dyer said she recognized its value nevertheless.

"I'm not that big on scare tactics," Dyer said. "Since we were young we've been watching movies that say Don't Drink, Don't Smoke, Don't Drink and Drive. But if it helps a couple kids, it's worthwhile."

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Photos



Ben Laing/Staff photo Newburyport senior Greg Short sits at a drunken driving simulator in the gym during yesterday's visit by the "Save a Life" tour, a drunken driving awareness group. Staff Photographer