

Drunk driving No. 1 teen killer, students told

By Carol Axilzen
staff writer

Brian wasn't a teen-ager when he learned the hard facts about drinking and driving.

But the 28-year-old Madison Heights resident, who survived a near-fatal car crash two years ago, thinks teen-agers can benefit from his experience.

"I just want to tell them it's not a joking matter," he said. "They should just wake up and take a look at themselves before they kill someone."

Brian spent a month in a hospital recuperating from head injuries and broken bones before serving a 90-day jail sentence for manslaughter.

Brian was in Southfield last week to tell his story to a handful of high school students.

HE WAS among three speakers who made a pitch for the newly organized Students Against Driving Drunk (SAAD) organization. The program was sponsored by the Traffic Improvement

Association of Oakland County in cooperation with the Oakland County Health Division and Oakland Schools.

A growing national movement, SAAD was started nearly a year ago by Robert Anastas, director of health education for the Wayland (Mass.) Public Schools.

Anastas, a former hockey coach who gives pep talks to fire up the audience, has been taking his tough message to high schools throughout the country.

He began his hard-sell presentation by expressing disappointment at the size of the audience.

"This room should have been filled with teen-agers. There's no excuse why schools didn't send busloads of kids here."

ANASTAS MOVED quickly into the cold, hard facts. "Drunk driving is the number one killer of teen-agers. About 6,000 to 8,000 kids in your age bracket die a year (in alcohol-related crashes). But statistics don't mean much to people until they become real. I'm

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— Robert Anastas

trying to make this real for you because when you challenge death, you're going to die."

The tough former coach said he launched the SAAD movement after two of his hockey players died in car crashes.

"One boy was 17. He had a few beers at a party, and he had to be home at 11 p.m. So he jumped into his car, drove 50 miles an hour across town, hit a tree, blew himself out of the passenger door and died."

"There were maybe 50 kids at that party. But no one said, 'John, don't drive the car' or 'John, we'll take you home.'"

Not long after the accidents, Anastas visited public schools in Long Island where 14 teen-agers had died in alcohol-related crashes.

"WE BLITZED" that area. High school students started SAAD programs and for the first time in 40 years, not one teen-ager died in an auto-accident over the Christmas break.

The moral of the story, Anastas said, is that students have the power to police one another.

That's the way the SAAD program works, he said. "It's positive peer pressure."

"All of you — the brains, jocks, and the burnouts — agree on one thing — that drinking and driving is bad. That's the key."

ANASTAS OUTLINED these steps for kicking off the program:

• Form a chapter in your school with 30-40 students.

• Set up a 15-day curriculum in driver's, health or physical education

programs. The curriculum would include speakers from local police departments, lawyers, judges, highway safety and alcohol beverage commission officials as well as survivors of alcohol-related crashes.

• Set aside a SAAD day in school to sell the idea. Bring in speakers to promote the message that "the number one killer isn't going to take anyone in our building."

• Get the community involved by going out and talking to people at supermarkets or in shopping centers. Sell bumper stickers to raise money for the chapter.

• Notify the media about your chapter's efforts. Write articles in student newspapers.

• Sign a contract with your parents.

Parents agree to give their son or daughter the car as long as they, in turn, agree not to drink while behind

the wheel. Students also agree to call parents for advice and/or transportation if either they or any of their friends have too much to drink.

Some SAAD chapters even form taxi or van services, Anastas said. Others may organize a "call-a-ride" group with students manning a telephone on Friday and Saturday nights to provide transportation for drinkers.

THE PROGRAM has won nationwide recognition. The secretary of Health and Human Services plans to highlight the SAAD program at a youth conference this year.

Many states have joined with Anastas in the fight against drunk driving. In Iowa, 500 chapters have formed, he said.

And, even major liquor companies have contributed donations.

Anastas attributes his success to a simple, direct message — that students can help themselves.

'Bread' lobby to hear Levin

How to lobby effectively for legislation to alleviate the hunger problem will be discussed at a workshop 7:30-9 p.m. today in the Juliette Center, 19750 Beech, Redford.

U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-Southfield,

whose district includes Redford, is expected to attend, according to the workshop's sponsoring group, Bread for the World Coordinating Committee of the 17th Congressional District.

OU workshop on careers

The Oakland University Continuum Center will present a "Careers in Transition" workshop from 7:30-10:30 p.m. Mondays beginning today through March 28 at the Holy Spirit Church in West Bloomfield.

The workshop helps participants decide what job they want and teaches them how to get it.

Registration information is available by calling the Continuum Center, 377-3033.

Sexuality workshops at WSU Center

A workshop on human sexuality will be offered beginning this weekend at the Southfield Extension Center of Wayne State University's College of Life-long Learning, 25610 11 Mile.

Workshops are scheduled Friday, Saturday and Sunday and Feb. 25-27.

The latest developments in the field will be presented by experts in education, communication, physiology, counseling and therapy.

Registration information is available by calling the WSU center at 358-2104.

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