

Project Graduation kids cut loose - within limits

By Wayne Peal
staff writer

It had all the makings of a celebration — a four-piece band pumped out rock music, while banner-waving youngsters sang, clapped and danced in the aisles.

The youngsters, participants in Project Graduation programs at area high schools, had something to celebrate, too.

Alcohol-related deaths are down among teenagers, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, with drivers 15-17 posting the biggest decrease.

The new statistics weren't lost on any speakers or participants who kicked off 1991 Project Graduation activities Tuesday at Masonic Auditorium, Detroit.

Project Graduation aims to reduce drinking and drug use among area high school students. The 40 percent drop in teen drunk driving deaths from 1982-89 was seen as evidence the program, and others like it, are working.

"WE'RE GETTING the feeling we're making a difference," said Sandi Wolf, director of Wayne County Mothers Against Drunk Driving, a sponsor of Project Graduation activities.

Part pep rally, part heart-to-heart

discussion, Tuesday's program aimed to pump up participants, getting them to spread the anti-drinking, anti-drug message among classmates.

The entertainment, including a high-stepping rap group, and several hyper disc jockeys, didn't obscure the message.

"It was fun," said Charles Smith Jr. of Southfield High. "But they got their message across."

Charity Claramunt said it was the message, not the entertainment, that she would remember most.

"They had an emergency room doctor who spoke about what she sees as a result of drugs and drunk driving and she was pretty effective," the Redford Union student said.

OU research grants on rise

External funding for research and other sponsored program activity at Oakland University hit a record \$6.6 million for the fiscal year 1989-90, up more than \$525,000 over the previous year, according to OU officials.

As part of that \$6.6 million total, the figures from the office of Research and Academic Development show external research support at

Other serious moments included a moment of silence for all youngsters killed through drug- or alcohol-related illness and injuries. Banners, specially prepared for the occasion by Redford Thurston students, bore the names of those who died.

But Tuesday's rally was mostly a high-energy affair. Audience members were encouraged to shout, stomp and generally cut loose and they responded — making an Arsenio Hall Show audience seem almost comatose in comparison.

More than 3,000 youngsters, from an estimated 60 area high schools, attended the event.

The sharing of youthful energy served a valuable purpose, organizers said.

"These are kids who sometimes

may feel they're in the minority in their schools," Wolf said. "Here, they can look around and see that there's thousands of other students who share their beliefs."

It also showed, as several speakers were quick to point out, that youngsters didn't need alcohol or drugs to have a good time.

Project Graduation, a collaborative effort between WTWS-TV, Detroit and area 7-Eleven stores.

Project representatives are available to help students group organize and plan activities.

"We're there to help, but we really want the students to take leadership themselves," Wolf said.

7-Eleven is the program's major corporate sponsor. The long list of additional sponsors includes Birmingham-Bloomfield Families in Action, Wayne and Oakland county regional school agencies, the Oak-

land County health Department, Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, as well as other private and public agencies.

Additional information on Project Graduation is available by calling Agnes Scott, WTWS vice president for special services, 876-8379 or Sandi Wolf at Wayne County MADD, 422-6233.

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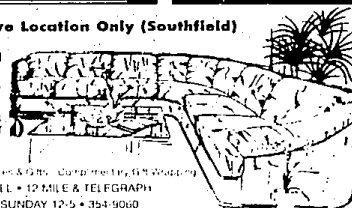
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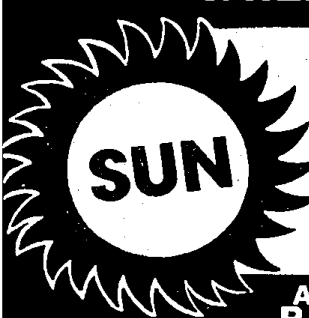


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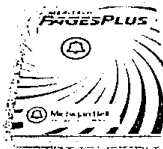
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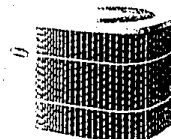
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