

Drunk driving message hits home at CHS

BY JONI HUBERD
STAFF WRITER

"It's just the real story...my experience. This could happen to anybody."

Jason Barber knows drunken driving statistics are more than just numbers. He knows because he falls into two categories: perpetrator and victim.

Ten years ago, Barber and some friends decided to race their cars after having had too much to drink. He was behind the wheel of his truck, with his brother Aaron seated next to him.

What happened next changed Jason's life forever and has transformed the lives of thousands of people who have heard his story. On Tuesday, Clarencville High students joined those ranks.

"It's a message they can't hear enough," said Principal David Simowski.

Barber is among five speakers sponsored through Anheuser-Busch's nationwide effort to fight underage drinking and drinking and driving. The program is offered free, like so many other outside presentations Simowski encounters during the school year.

"They sent an advance tape. As soon as I saw the tape, I realized this gentleman was going to have an impact," he said.

Students were deeply moved by Barber's story, some to tears. Not only did his actions lead to his brother's death, but they resulted in his being sent to prison for three and a half years, after a conviction for vehicular manslaughter.

Asked how his parents reacted, Barber recalled winking up after spending the night in surgery. His parents and grandfather were at his bedside.

"I saw the three of them, and I said, 'I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry,' he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. "My folks stood by me when they had every reason to

abandon me."

The family did seek counseling, and Barber has learned to value them as never before.

"When I was your guys' age, I alienated myself from them. I disrespected my family to hang out with my friends. Today, I give to my family...I know Sunday dinner is important to my mom, so I'm there."

In addition to a message about drinking, Barber talked about the importance of using seat belts and closed with a message about why he does what he does, traveling the country to talk to teens and parents.

"I never believed I was the kind of man who could get in front of a room like this and speak, but I found something I was passionate about."

"Find an issue you feel passionate about. The only thing worse than dying and leaving this world is dying without leaving a mark. You guys...find your mark."

That message hit home with senior Jason Price of Livonia.

"He really inspired me to speak out in my school and community," he said as students milled around Barber after the presentation.

Visibly moved, senior Justin Lohman called Barber "the best speaker I've ever heard." When Barber talked about how his little brother died, Lohman said he thought about his own younger brother.

"The things he said really made me think about the choices I make," Lohman said.

"I never realized how serious drunk driving is and how harsh the impacts can be," said senior Jason Price.

Barber's visit was sponsored by Central Distributors of Beer, based in Romulus. Bill Ventola, coordinator of consumer awareness and education, said the company is committed to helping young people stay safe.

"Jason's story makes a powerful impact



BARBER/CLARENCVILLE

Jason Barber, who served three and a half years in prison for a drunk driving accident that killed his younger brother, greets students after his moving presentation at Clarencville High Monday.

and brings a message to high-school students they will learn from and never forget," he said.

Barber was doing presentations in Orange County, Calif., when Anheuser-Busch's local distributor saw the program. He started talking to the company in St. Louis, Mo., and has continued traveling for the past three years.

Even today, he said, he sees the effect of his actions so long ago.

While visiting his parents, who live in the same house as at the time of the crash, Barber was in a grocery store and saw Aaron's second-grade teacher.

"She saw me and she just started crying and walked away. It's been 10 years."

For more information about Anheuser-Busch's prevention programs, visit www.bceersponsible.com

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BILLS

FROM PAGE A1

county clerks to take over.

According to Farmington Hills City Clerk Kathy Dorman, clerks statewide are trying to get lawmakers to take a step back and look at what they're doing, because the current state of bills doesn't address the original problem.

Dorman said consolidation efforts began about 10 years ago. Clerks pushed for a unified ballot because school districts and cities held frequent and costly "special elections" during the year. Also, June school board elections suffered from poor turnout.

Proposal A changed the political landscape for school districts, which now have tighter restrictions on when they can hold millage elections. Also, Dorman said, cities hold fewer special elections because they draw a lot of public criticism.

WHERE'S THE PROBLEM?

Opponents, like Farmington Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield, have always wondered exactly where the problem lies.

"There's nothing anyone can point to and say 'This is a problem,'" Maxfield said Friday.

"There's a vague allegation that schools don't know how to run an election, and yet here in Farmington and Farmington Hills... we have a great cooperative effort," he added. "To me, there's never been a compelling reason to change elections."

Brian Whiston, director of State and Federal Affairs for Oakland Schools, doesn't see the problem state lawmakers are trying to solve. He pointed out that schools have had far fewer election complaints filed against them than cities or counties.

Still, Whiston is certain this issue is going to make it to a vote and soon.

"I think it's a real threat," he said. "It's been around eight or nine years, and it's working its way through the system."

He disputes the idea that increasing voter turnout is really at the heart of this issue.

"The August primaries are held... when most people are on vacation," he said. "They aren't worried about turnout then."

Whiston said school districts do favor a form of the legislation that would consolidate all school elections - everything from school board and bond issues to the college boards.

"If education is everyone's No. 1 priority," he said, "why not schedule an education election?"

School officials are also opposed to restrictions that could end up costing districts money. While school board elections might not be affected much, bond referendums would be impacted by the schools' lack of ability to schedule them to take advantage of low interest rates.

WON'T WORK EVERYWHERE

Dorman points out another difficulty with the proposed legislation, which requires that elections be run by city or township clerks, who can shift that responsibility to county clerks if they wish. That wouldn't be a problem in Oakland County, where most municipal clerks cooperate with school districts to run elections.

In more rural areas, however, some clerks work out of their homes and won't want to take on the additional responsibility. But no matter where this question arises, people who know absolutely nothing about the local school district could end up running the elections.

Imagine what would happen, she said, if Redford Township's clerk decided to "opt out." Responsibility would then shift to Wayne County.

"What does the Wayne County clerk know about running a school election in Redford?" Dorman asked. "Counties are cutting their budgets and staff. They don't want to take this on."

Dorman acknowledged that she'd like Farmington Public Schools to go to a fall ballot, every two years.

"It would save thousands of dollars if the schools didn't have to run an election," she said.

"A lot of times, too, it's a school board candidate who has no opposition. I wish we could work something out."

But as for the lame-duck legislature's attempt to resolve this issue 10 years after it was first proposed, Dorman said, "The intent of what we were trying to accomplish is no longer there."

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Take a local look at global issues

Community members who have lived in and have families currently living in countries experiencing serious conflict will be part of the discussion at "A Symposium on World Affairs," held Thursday, Nov. 21, 7 p.m., at the Farmington Training Center.

Moderated by Elias Khalil, International Relations teacher at North Farmington High School, the event will provide a view of world affairs through the eyes of local citizens.

Organizers say their goal is to increase awareness about areas of conflict in various parts of the world and to help local

citizens understand how those conflicts affect people who live and work in their community.

The symposium is offered free of charge.

Farmington Training Center is located at 33000 Thomas Street, north of Grand River in downtown Farmington, off of School Street. For further information, call 248-489-3339.

This event is sponsored by the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council, dedicated to promoting awareness and acceptance of diversity in the community.

FHS to present Twelfth Night

Farmington High School will present Twelfth Night by William Shakespeare at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 21, 22 and 23.

Tickets are available at the door and cost \$8 for adults, \$7 for students, \$6 if students have a gold card.

The school is at 32000 Shinwassee in Farmington.

The play is about both love and disguises, which begin when a woman named Viola is shipwrecked and lands in America with no money and no family.

For more information, call the school at (248) 489-3455.

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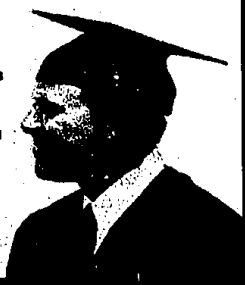
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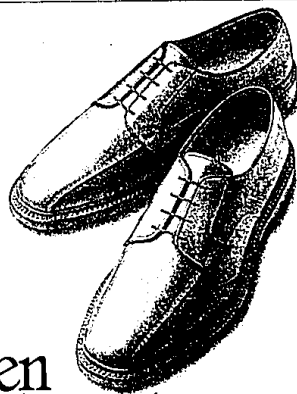
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