

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Operation Intervention shows dangers of drunk driving to CHMS students

Church Hill Middle eighth grade student Erica Cuellar fully understands the damaging results a drunk driver can cause.

When Erica was in kindergarten seven years ago, her mother Christina was killed by a drunk driver.

“My dad has done a good job, but it’s been very hard growing up without her,” Cuellar said. “To this day, the thought of never getting to see her again is devastating. I still think about my mom a lot.”

So when she was told a group called “Operation Intervention” geared toward educating students was coming to visit Church Hill Middle, Cuellar was elated.

“It’s so important to educate everyone, because I think a lot of people drink and drive,” she said. “This shows exactly what can happen when you get in the car after drinking alcohol.”

Operation Intervention was launched shortly after 19-year-old University of Texas student Anna Marie Hernandez was killed by a drunk driver in December 2003. She had recently graduated as the valedictorian of her South San High class when Anthony Ruiz hit her head-on driving the wrong way on Intestate 35 near the FM 306 exit.

Operation Intervention is run by the New Braunfels Police Department. They will visit any school they are invited to within driving range and hope to visit an average of 50 campuses per year.

Officers park a large trailer with two big screen television monitors attached on the side. They then show students Hernandez’s valedictorian speech,

footage of the wreck scene she died in, and play the actual 911 calls from the accident on the night of the crash.

“We want students to realize just how serious we are when we tell them about the dangers of drinking and driving,” said Heath Purvis, New Braunfels Police Department Traffic Sergeant. “More than 17,000 people nationwide are killed by drunk drivers every year.”

Students were then able to try and catch a Frisbee and drive a car in a simulated video game with “drunk goggles” on. The goggles mimicked the effect drinking can have on your vision and reaction time.

“I think this has a huge impact on the students,” said Comal ISD prevention education specialist Rosie Rodriguez. “I don’t think you can ever start this kind of education too early.”

Purvis said he’s seen Operation Intervention pay huge dividends.

“I had a girl whose high school we visited come up to me over the summer and tell me she and her friends used to drink and drive frequently,” he said. “Now, not only do they not drink and drive, they made a pact not to drink after seeing the video. That meant a lot to me and it shows we’re making a difference.”

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IN PHOTO: Church Hill Middle student Kendra Dietert tries to catch a Frisbee with “drunk goggles” on during a visit from Operation Intervention. The goggles mimic the effect drinking can have on your vision and reaction time.