

New gun safety campaign encourages people to ASK

BY PAUL COLLINS
THE CHRONICLE

Before Aug. 20, 1998, Carole Price didn't know there was a simple question that might have saved her son John's life: "Is there a gun where my child plays?"

Carole Price is the honorary spokesperson for PAX's national public health campaign called ASK (Asking Saves Kids), which urges parents to ask their neighbors, friends and relatives if there's a gun in the home before sending their children over to play. If a gun is present, parents are encouraged to ask how the gun is stored and make informed decisions about their children's playtime.

PAX, which is Latin for "peace," is an organization based in New York City. It is the largest non-political organization dedicated to ending the gun violence epidemic in America — an epidemic that kills 10 children every day, more than 3,500 each year.

In an advertisement for the ASK campaign, Carole Price says, "Aug. 20, 1998, began as an ordinary summer day. My son John asked to go to our neighbor's house. He'd been playing there for years, so I said yes. He tousled my hair as he always did and said, 'Thanks, Mom.'"

"I watched him through the dining room window as he stopped just short of our neighbor's front door and blew me a kiss, that was the last time I saw him alive."

"John was 13 years old. Twenty minutes later the police came to my front door. They said my neighbor's 9-year-old child went to an upstairs bedroom, opened a dresser drawer and took out a handgun. Playing with the gun, the child pulled the trigger and John, who was watching TV, was struck in his face and died instantly."

"Astonishingly, I have since learned that over 40 percent of homes with children in America have guns, and many of these guns are left unlocked or unloaded. And every year thousands of children are seriously injured or killed with these guns — like my beloved John."

"So, this summer, before you send your child over to a friend's house to play, please, ask if there is a gun in that home. If I had only known to ask, my son might still be alive today."

Before the end of school May 23, nearly every elementary and middle school student in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System will bring home an ASK brochure for his or her parents. The brochure provides tips to help parents feel comfortable when asking neighbors or relatives about guns in the home.

Tips to make asking easier:
• Ask with other questions. Include the question (is there a gun in your home?) along with other things you might normally discuss before sending your child to someone's house — such as animals or allergies.

• Use the facts. More than 40 percent of homes with children have a gun and many of those guns are left unlocked or loaded. That's why you're asking the question: you just want to make sure that your child is safe.

If your neighbor, friend or relative says there is a gun in the home, you need to make



Maxwell

absolutely sure that all guns are stored unloaded and locked — ideally in a gun safe — with ammunition locked separately. Hiding guns is not enough. There are countless tragic stories of kids finding guns that parents thought were well hidden. If there are any doubts about the safety of someone's home, you should invite the children to play at your house instead.

• Work through groups. Introduce the ASK concept through a group or community effort, such as your religious organization or PTA.

• Don't be confrontational. Present your concerns in a respectful manner. You are simply trying to make sure your child is playing in a safe environment.

Tracy Maxwell, vice president of the Forsyth County chapter of the Million Mom March, which is implementing the ASK campaign locally, said, "Proper gun storage is especially important in the summer months when many children are unsupervised for hours every day...Ninety percent of accidental shootings involving children are linked to an easy-to-find, loaded gun in the home...It's some adults who are irresponsible about gun storage, but too often it's the children who die."

Maxwell said, "When children find guns in the home and bad things happen, it's almost doubly tragic because it's unintentional usually. The injury is unintentional whether it's to another child or another person in the home or to the child who found the gun. So there's loss of life or severe injury, and even though it's an accident, it doesn't change the reality to the person who was injured or killed, and that's what we're trying to prevent."

Maxwell said, "Setting rules about not touching guns is ... not enough for children...The best of children will break rules. Every parent knows that. A gun is very tempting in our society, which is pretty much saturated with media violence. Our society glorifies violence. We have violence as entertainment in our movies and our television. Presenting a child with an object of violence such as a gun in the home is just asking for trouble."

"Just way too many lives (are) being lost — about one North Carolina child a week..."

Maxwell added, "Suicide is a big part of loss of life when it comes to guns in the home."

Maxwell said of the ASK campaign: "Responsible gun owners and nongun owners (alike) should be able to embrace this message of safety and sensible storage (of guns in the home)." She said, "There is no need to be polarized in this

argument about rights and the goods and the bads of owning guns. Basically they're (guns are) out there, and they're already in the home."

Maxwell also pointed out that ASK is a national advertising campaign developed in collaboration with the American Academy of Pediatrics, a large national organization concerned with the health and welfare of children. "It really is a health issue in many aspects," she said.

PAX provides these other statistics, from various sources: More American homes have guns (43 percent) than dogs (40 percent). One out of three handguns is kept loaded and unlocked in the home. About 1.2 million elementary school-age latch key children have access to guns when they are home alone. Eighty-eight percent of the children who are injured or killed in unintentional shootings are shot in their own homes or in the homes of relatives or friends. Some 2.6 million children live in homes where firearms are stored unlocked and loaded or with ammunition nearby. More than 75 percent of kids in homes with guns know where the guns are hidden.

The first annual National ASK Day was held on Aug. 20, 2001. This year's National ASK Day is scheduled for June 20.

Good Genes



Photo courtesy of Morehouse College

Winston-Salem native Harold L. Martin Jr. made history at Morehouse College's 118th commencement Sunday. Martin, a member of Phi Beta Kappa who received a degree in business administration, became the first Morehouse student to be the senior class president and the class valedictorian. Martin was also the recipient of the 2001 B.R. Brazel Alumni Award, which is given to the student that best exemplifies the qualities of the college. He has also devoted countless volunteer hours to tutoring and mentoring young people. Martin co-founded the college's Big Brother program. Martin is expected to start work as a business analyst at Atlanta's McKinsey & Co. He is the eldest son of Winston-Salem State University Chancellor Harold Martin Sr. and Forsyth County Attorney Davida Martin.

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Beauticians group endorses Dan Blue

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

GREENSBORO — N.C. State Beauticians & Cosmetologists Association announced its endorsement of Dan Blue at its recent annual convention in Greensboro. The association, made up of more than 5,000 members statewide, advocates education and professional development.

"Dan is the candidate for all working people. People that have to work for a living need a voice in Washington, and we believe Dan is that voice," said NCBCA President Morris Boswell. "Dan realizes that a lot of families struggle to make ends meet, and we believe he will push for better economic security."

Boswell also noted Blue's record of support for health-care and prescription-drug coverage

under Medicare, and public schools.

"We appreciate Dan's commitment to public education," Boswell added. The association has committed to aiding a grass-roots



Blue

campaign by generating awareness in the members' salons statewide.

"With hundreds of members across the state serving thousands of clients weekly, we plan to make Dan Blue our next United States senator," he said.

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