

# 'DEAD' GRAPHIC DEMONSTRATION Seven Black-Clad West Students Tell The Drunk-Driving Story

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN

Seven black-clad, white-faced students at West Brunswick High School (WBHS) gave a graphic demonstration last Thursday of the consequences of driving drunk.

Simulating corpses, they went through the school day without speaking and placed their own homemade tombstones in the front hall of the school.

The message over the tombstones read, "SADD Cemetery: Don't Drive Drunk." The messengers were members of Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD) who had sponsored a day of drug and alcohol awareness programs last Wednesday.

While the heads of juniors and seniors were filled with visions of prom night, Don Gates and Rita Hatcher, anticipating this April 11 event, infused those visions with some hard reality.

Deputy Gates, crime prevention officer with the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, and Ms. Hatcher, the school system's wellness coordinator, brought the consequences of drinking, drug use and driving to the attention of young people through videos and discussion.

The daylong series of presentations brought all juniors and seniors to the school library during their English class period. There they saw *None for the Road*, a hard-hitting video that featured statistics and information about the effects of alcohol and marijuana on the brain and on driving competence.

Gates told the kids that one out of every 11 high school seniors uses marijuana daily. "When they graduate with this habit, they just continue it on the job," he said.

The results show up, among other places, in highway statistics, he said. "The risk of automobile accidents increases with the use of marijuana. It

*"Drive as if every other driver is drunk."*

—Deputy Don Gates



impairs skills and perception and judgment and the effects are different on different people. For everyone, reactions are delayed."

Students were treated to a view of the highway and traffic through the eyes of "stoned" drivers and saw a clinical version of how the drug works in the brain.

"A mixture of marijuana and alcohol is twice as deadly," Gates went on.

One person is killed every 20 minutes in an alcohol-related accident, he said.

The message for prom-goers? "Drive as if every other driver on the road is drunk," Gates warned. "On prom night, nothing good happens after 11 p.m. The average drinker consumes 3.3 beers and drunk drivers increase steadily after 11 o'clock till a peak at 3 a.m. After that, these drivers are either at home, the hospital or the morgue."

Ms. Hatcher told the kids, "We want you to have a good time, but we want it to be a safe time. We want you around for a long time."

She said at the close of the day that students had appeared to be very responsive to the presentation.

"One boy shared the information that his brother had been killed in a drunk-driving accident," she said. "We always ask them to share any personal experiences of this kind."

Several students came to the presentation twice, she said, and others brought their friends to see it.

Melba Johnson, WBHS English teacher, is the SADD adviser there and said the group now meets after school and has declined from about 100 members to 25, "since we quit meeting during the school day."

The West Brunswick prom was held Saturday at Sea Trails Plantation, with a drug-free, alcohol-free, after-prom party at the 2001 night club in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

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