

## High school seniors get the picture about drunken driving

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**MERRIMACK** – There was a deadly realistic show-and-tell at Merrimack High School this week.

The graduating class saw a depiction of a fatal crash caused by a drunken driver and heard from people all too familiar with the problem.

Four hundred seniors sat silent as town emergency service personnel, SADD students, residents, school administrators and faculty members simulated the accident Wednesday. The alarm for emergency response rang out at 9:42 a.m.

"Give yourself time to make the right decisions," said police Capt. Mark Doyle.

Behind Doyle were two damaged vehicles with injured occupants, including an infant (a doll) in a car seat and a teenager killed while smashing through a windshield. The ground was strewn with blood and empty beer bottles as Merrimack firefighters cut the roof of one of the vehicles to remove victims.

"Unfortunately, there's been too many times they had to do this for real," said Merrimack Fire and Rescue Assistant Chief David Parenti.



Sophomore Mike Sexton lay motionless on the hood of a crashed car, killed in the accident. The driver, senior Greg Tucker, was given a field sobriety test and was arrested for DWI.

"They're here to watch everything unfold rather than reading it in the newspaper," said fire and rescue Chief Michael Currier. "There's always an innocent involved."

The victims in the second vehicle were Lisa Rawnsley, the parent of a junior, and Bryan Young, a school guidance counselor. Their baby was seriously injured. A Boston MedFlight helicopter was called in; it landed in an adjacent sports field and took off with the injured child.

Jeff Smarse was the guest speaker. He was a driver in a DWI accident that killed a New Hampshire woman. He began by asking students to observe a moment of silence, which lasted for 33 seconds. He explained that someone in the United States dies at the hands of a drunken driver every 33 seconds.

Late on a Sunday night in June 1992, Smarse drove drunk on the F.E. Everett Turnpike and smashed into the rear of a vehicle at the Bedford toll booth at 90 mph, killing Eve Geissinger, 38, of Littleton.

He was convicted of Class A felony negligent homicide and sentenced to 7 to 15 years in prison. He talked to students Wednesday about what his drunken driving had cost and urged them not to make the same bad decisions.

Senior Evan Gomes described the event as "powerful." Classmate Aaron Davis called it "a good learning experience."

Jim Bailey, owner of Bailey's Towing and an on-call Merrimack firefighter, provided the wrecked vehicles. He is widely recognized for his support of students.

"I graduated from this school and have a personal interest in every graduating class. Young people need as much reinforcement as they can get to make the right decisions," said Bailey. "If one student in the audience learns something from this - mission accomplished."

Police Capt. Michael Dudash added some sobering statistics separate from the event.

"In 2006, MPD made 79 DWI arrests," he said.

He added some statistics from the New Hampshire Highway Safety Agency: "In 2005, in the U.S., 43,444 people died in motor vehicle-related accidents; 16,885 - 325 per week - as a result of drivers who consumed alcohol and made the decision to drive. Since 1995 in New Hampshire, the number of motor vehicle-related deaths has risen from 118 per year to 127. Of those numbers, the percentage of alcohol-related fatalities has risen from 28.8

percent to 34.6 percent."

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