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High-tech alcohol awareness

BY JEFF REINITZ, COURIER STAFF WRITER

WATERLOO --- Hawkeye Community College students had a chance to get the feel of driving drunk in the safety and security of the campus cafeteria Monday.

With the help of a multi-screen simulator --- complete with dashboard and bucket seat --- passers-by took turns getting behind the wheel to maneuver around a virtual city as a computer program gradually applied the effects of inebriation to their driving skills.

Robert Fisher, marketing director for Edu-tainment by Kramer, said the simulator --- part of the company's Save A Life alcohol awareness tour --- is a cutting-edge way to teach about the dangers of intoxicated driving to young motorists.



Hawkeye Community College student Brennan Ott keeps his eyes on the traffic Monday as he tries his hand at a drunken-driving simulator. RICK CHASE / Courier Staff Photographer

"The old methods of lectures don't seem to be hitting today's generation," Fisher said.

Instead of having police officers, teachers or other authority figures address the issue, Edu-tainment has people whose lives have been effected by drunk driving share their personal stories.

A real casket often accompanies the display.

"We're kind of the shock jocks of anti-drunk driving," Fisher said.



Hawkeye Community College student Barb Sharp reacts as she tries her hand at a drunken-driving simulator Monday. On the break is simulator operator Chris Geysbeek.. RICK CHASE / Courier Staff Photographer

The trip begins sober, but every 15 seconds the computer adjusts the controls as if the driver is getting drunk.

Drivers lose control, the screens are blurred and reaction time slips.

"As your DUI level increases, you develop the tunnel vision that is the hallmark of drunk driving," Fisher said.

Spectators watch on the screens.

The company behind the simulation, Kramer Entertainment Inc. of Grand Rapids, Mich., started in the 1980s as a high-tech amusement business. The Edu-tainment program is an educational spin-off, and the Save A Life Tour has been used by the United States military, insurance companies and hospitals.