

Learning a life lesson

By: **MARIE BURKITT** (Fri, Oct/20/2006)

PHILADELPHIA — Holy Family University students learned about the perils of drinking and driving and tried out simulation technology Wednesday. It was an eye-opening lesson.

"This feels so weird," said Joe Reiber of Northeast Philadelphia, a Holy Family sophomore student, as he experienced driving while drunk. "It does feel like a real car, but I feel like I'm being more careful than if I were driving a real car."

The National Make a Difference "Save a Life" Tour visited the campus as part of the school's alcohol and drug awareness week activities. The tour uses simulation technology to teach drivers about alcohol awareness, said Chris Geysbeek, the tour manager.

"We tour all over the United States. We've been to high schools, military academies, colleges and some corporate events," he said.

The simulator places the participant in a "random" environment that features 80 miles of roadway, traffic and an array of weather conditions.

The participant begins driving "sober," but the simulation's steering wheel and car seat work together to make the participant feel impaired. The level of difficulty increases the longer the participant drives because the simulator begins to react more slowly, said Geysbeek.

"When you drink, there's a major delay in your motor skills. The alcohol in your system makes you react slower, so what the simulator does is create that impairment. The steering wheel, gas and brake are delayed, which then makes you feel delayed," said Geysbeek.

In addition to the simulator, the tour featured posters that picture tombstones depicting "victims" who never graduated from high school, designated drivers holding car keys and an adult-size casket all driving home the message.

"I think this is a great idea. This is an interesting way to get the message out," said Stephanie Mongiello, a Holy Family senior from Levittown.

Many students in the cafeteria stopped to test the simulator, read the posters and observe, while others were touched by it, as evidenced by one student's note.

"She wrote, 'Thank you so much for being here today. ... You have truly changed my life,' " Geysbeek said. "Sometimes the constant traveling is difficult because we're on the road for months at a time, but things like that make it all worth it.

"This tour brings a different atmosphere to anti-drinking and driving. We don't tell people, 'Don't drink!' This tour is more focused on getting the message out and showing people, like, 'Look, this is what can happen to you if you do drink and drive.' "

Marie Burkitt can be reached at news@phillyBurbs.com.

Article's URL:

<http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/111-10202006-729748.html>