

Drunken driving simulator stops at college

By Andrea Koskey The Daily Times

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FARMINGTON — When Thomas Murphy, 21, made a right-hand turn while driving Monday morning and then over corrected, he narrowly missed several houses and steered back onto the street. Once he got back on the road, however, he over corrected and T-boned a vehicle traveling the opposite direction.

Luckily, the "collision" Murphy was involved in was all part of a simulation created to teach people the delays and dangers of drinking and driving.

"It's very different than you expect," Murphy said after taking a ride in the simulator. "It gets harder as you go along. There's a delayed reaction when you try to turn, and you end up crashing."

Murphy was one of nearly a dozen students at San Juan College who sat in the test vehicle and tried to drive along the streets, abiding by all driving laws and not causing an accident.

Despite being warned to treat the car like a normal vehicle, as well as use all areas of vision (there are five screens with the simulator mimicking normal vision), all participants crashed at some point during the course, crisscrossed traffic, ran red lights or stopped short of intersections.

"It had really good brakes," Murphy said, jokingly, when he stopped several yards short of an intersection. "It seemed like it would be really easy."



Taylor James, 18, tries to regain control of his simulated... (Lindsay Pierce/The Daily Times)

The program is crossing the country, setting up and allowing people of all ages to take a turn driving the car.

Known as the "Save A Life Tour," the program does not impair vision while driving like some other simulations — instead it delays reaction time.

"We hope this will at least open people's eyes about the dangers of drinking and driving," Save A Life Tour Associate Jonathan Wilson said. "You are sober (while driving this simulation), yet you still can't do it. You over correct, and the most common reaction is people get tunnel vision even with five screens around them to simulate a real car with visibility."

The program started six years ago in Michigan. Yet drinking and driving casualties continued to rise, prompting program organizers to travel the country. Most of this week will be spent in New Mexico.

Wilson said the game does not tell how much alcohol a driver has consumed because organizers do not want participants to think they can have that many drinks and be OK in real life.

"(The simulation) goes to as much as a 0.34 BAC (blood alcohol content)," Wilson explained. "The amount of alcohol is different for everyone, we want people to be aware and have someone (sober) take the keys if you've had a drink."

The legal limit in New Mexico is a 0.08 BAC.

Like Murphy, James Maes, 36, had a hard time controlling the vehicle.

"You don't realize what you're doing when you're doing it," Maes said. "You over correct and go in the grass, then you over correct and hit a car."

Once the simulation concludes in Farmington, Wilson and a traveling partner will be off to Santa Fe to present the program to high school, college and military students.