

# Addison Trail students get sobering lesson

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Posted Wednesday, October 11, 2006

Nate Pierson swerves in a ditch, runs a stop sign and suddenly rams into a building.

I'm doing terrible on this one, said Pierson, an Addison Trail High School freshman while driving in a state-of-the-art simulator.

Fortunately for him, it's not a test in a driver's education class.

It's an exercise in a multi-screen simulator that allows drivers who are sober to experience the effects of driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Students have trouble controlling their make-believe car inside the Addison Trail gymnasium.

The simulator, which is in the form of a video game, is a component of the Save a Life tour, a national drinking and driving campaign, which made it's only stop in the region at Addison Trail last week.

While police cars take up the road, weather conditions such as snow and rain put the driver in real-life situations, said Chris Geysbeek, manager of Kramer Entertainment, a Michigan-based company that provided the equipment.

Some features include traffic stops with other cars alongside the driver. Making left- or right-hand turns appears to put drivers in a tricky predicament.

The idea of this is the more they swerve, the more they're out of control, the more their eyes have to scan, the more depth perception they get, he said.

Sophomore Chris Vazquez agrees.

In a video game, you mess around and blow red lights, Vazquez said. Here, you have to focus on what you're doing.

Before the simulation challenge, students came together to watch some real-life images of drinking and driving accidents. On two projection monitors, the students saw the impact and it hit home, Principal Scott Helton said.

I thought the video was graphic and was necessary to have, sophomore Olga Ratajski said.

In fact, two students became sick because of the graphic images and had to be carried out of the gymnasium.

It's a pretty powerful message, said Helton, who recalled an incident two years ago involving an Addison Trail student.

That student, Bhavin Patel, was killed while lying in the street after drinking at a party. He was struck by a sport utility vehicle. Helton believes the images may have caused students to relive the horror of losing one of their own.

If you don't educate, Helton said, it's useless.

Since 2002, the Save a Life tour has gone to more than 750 locations across the country. The tour's slogan is "I'll take the keys."

At Addison Trail, Helton said they wanted students to hear about the dangers of drinking and driving before Red Ribbon Week, which is held at the end of the month. During that week, schools have presentations about drugs and alcohol awareness.

The effect of drinking and driving has been life-changing for Geysbeek.

He told students about one of his best friends who was killed by a drunken driver just before high school graduation.

Geysbeek, who said he stopped driving drunk since that accident, recalled how his best friend's mom looked him in the face and said, Don't ever let yourself be the kind of person that could kill my kid.