

## Tour stops at Serena High to prevent drunken driving

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When senior Chris Brandenburg got behind the wheel, he hadn't consumed any alcohol. But based on his perception of the roadway in front of him, he felt like it.

"It was a lot harder than I thought it would be," he said of his driving experience. "It wouldn't turn the way I wanted it to turn. Then I turned it too far back. I spun out."

Brandenburg and his peers at Serena High School experienced a computer-based simulator designed to show them what it feels like to drive under the influence of alcohol. The computer delays reaction times to a student's driving decisions, simulating the delay caused by the chemical influence of alcohol.

"It was an eye-opener," said Katy Atkerson, a senior. "Not many people drink and drive that I know, but you would think you would just have to concentrate. You don't think about all of the other things you have to pay attention to. It was very realistic. I can't imagine how hard it would be when you are not sober."

During Atkerson's drive, another vehicle ran a stop sign and hit her vehicle. Because she was concentrating so hard on keeping her car on the road, she did not notice what was happening in her peripheral vision until it was too late.

The simulators were part of the Save A Life Tour, a national campaign aimed at teaching students the impact of drinking and driving, using a combination of the simulator, the personal account of the speaker presenting the materials and a graphic video depicting real-life emergency room footage as victims of drunken driving are brought in for treatment.



After a presentation first thing Tuesday morning, individual classes returned to the gymnasium to try the simulator. The premise of the tour, which has been active about seven years, is to "knock a few heads around," said Brian Beldyga, senior manager of the tour, who also shares his personal experience with drinking and driving (see related story).

The biggest challenge is overcoming the idea that "it could never happen to me." Beldyga recalls a six-month trip overseas where he talked to teens about whether they feared alcohol could impair their driving.

"They would say, 'It could happen to me.' It was a complete 180 (degree change). It blew me away," he said. "We have a binge society where people don't just drink to have a few drinks. We drink to push the limits to see how much our bodies can take."

Beldyga's presentation includes a mix of humor and in-your-face facts about alcohol in language teens relate to. The video, he warns, is graphic enough that some students will actually pass out. But all the footage is real.

"I couldn't hardly handle watching (the video)," said Brandenburg. "But it's what got most of our attention. It shows it really can happen to you."

Serena High's guidance counselor Cathy Noel watched a promotional DVD of the campaign and was impressed with what she saw, persuading school officials to bring the program to the school.

"It's interactive for the kids. (The speaker's) story was something they could relate to so much. That has a lot to do with it. Plus the simulators. And he is not just talking at them," she said. "We're not going to reach everybody but something is better than nothing."

Atkerson said the presentation is something she will talk about with others.

"To be honest, when we sit at these presentations, we think it's going to be lame. But he shared his life story," she said. "He has a reason to be here and that impressed us the most. He knows what he is talking about."

Senior John Whalen agreed.

"I thought it was really good," he said. "The simulators were neat. And the real-life experience, that has an impact."

For more information about the Save A Life Tour, call 888-655-7263 or go to [www.savealifetour.com](http://www.savealifetour.com).