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## Mock Crash Serves to Warn Young Drivers

by Katelyn Kelleher

Students at Bacon Academy dressed up in their finest attire before school Thursday, May 24 – then they doused themselves in blood.

In a mock car crash, the bloodied and battered teenagers laid draped across or slumped in two “collided” cars in the Bacon Academy parking lot.

Students in Colchester’s Youth Advisory Council (YAC) enacted the mock crash for their classmates to actually see the consequences of distracted driving, in an effort they called “One Text or Call Could Wreck it All.”

Five YAC students, Kay McComiskey, Jordan Spalla, Courtney Wilson, Dan Brainard and Matt Caples, portrayed a group of teens on their way to the prom and another teen who had just received his learner’s permit.

Spalla, a sophomore, explained the story behind the crash was a passenger in one of the vehicles went to take a photo of the driver. The driver, not paying attention, crashed into the other vehicle.

“We weren’t wearing our seatbelts and we were not safe and we swerved the steering wheel and went into the other lane,” she said.

McComiskey, also a sophomore, portrayed the unfortunate passenger in that vehicle. In a gown and covered in blood, she laid face down on the hood of the car, her character having been thrown through the windshield.

State troopers, Colchester Police and the Colchester-Hayward Fire Department arrived on the scene and went to work “rescuing” the actors while the entire Bacon Academy student body watched.

The crews set to work stabilizing each of the victims before loading them into ambulances. The top of one of the vehicles was removed to extricate one of the teens, simulating the Jaws of Life.

One of the teens was placed on the pavement and covered with a white blanket. A “grieving father” mourned over the body before it was loaded into a hearse and taken away.

Finally, the distracted driver was arrested by police and the students at Bacon were ushered inside.

Although crews responded to the mock accident as if it were real, Resident Trooper Supervisor Marc Petruzzi speculated that a real accident just can’t be duplicated. “Can you really re-create the chaos of a fatal accident involving high schoolers? No you can’t.”

To further the impact on their peers, the YAC students chose to wear the blood all day.

The group started planning the mock accident, which is put on every four years so each class gets to see it once, in September, McComiskey said. “It takes a lot of planning to get the fire department and Lifestar here,” she said. “But when we got here this morning it didn’t really take that long to get all the blood and everything.”

Although the group had hoped a Lifestar helicopter would make an appearance at the scene, overcast skies prevented it from flying that day.

Jennifer Sloat from Colchester Youth and Social Services worked with the students organizing the event, who range from freshmen to seniors, and attested for all their hard work.

“They meet once a week and it’s all volunteering working on this scenario,” she said. “They made the scripts, came up with the costume and the idea to have the prom party and the permit driver.”

“It was all very frustrating for them because unfortunately everyone at one point has texted [while driving],” she said.

Sloat said typically the same group of responders volunteers for the mock accident. “We



Youth Action Council member Kay McComiskey portrays a student thrown through a windshield in a mock car accident at Bacon Academy May 24.

get a lot of help from the fire department,” she said.

Youth and Social Services Director Valerie Geato said School Resource Officer Tim Edwards was also instrumental in putting together the mock accident, which she believed students have been organizing since 1993.

After the crash, students attended an assembly program by IMPACT (Mourning Parents Act), led by Sherry Chapman. Chapman told the students if the program became too difficult for them they could leave. Many students did just that, leaving the gymnasium in tears to meet with school staff for guidance.

Among the speakers included David Graham of East Windsor, who was involved in a 2005 wreck that killed his girlfriend’s brother, and badly injured his brother and the 60-year-old driver of the car he hit. Graham, 22 at the time of the accident, explained he was showing off his new car, traveling more than 100 miles per hour when he crossed the line and hit the other driver. The next thing he remembered was waking up with a tree on his leg, his girlfriend’s 18-year-old brother crushed by the tree and his own brother also pinned.

Graham told the students he was not a risk-taker and could not believe he was driving that fast. “It just takes one mistake,” he told the students.

Because of his “one mistake” Graham was charged with manslaughter and assault. He told the students, in gruesome detail, about the time he spent in jail and warned them to do anything they could to “never end up there.”

Sophomores Casey Tsamis and Raeanne Veronsi said the mock accident was eye-opening but the IMPACT speakers even more so.

“It terrified me. It was like a smack in the face, pretty much,” Veronsi said. “I saw people running out of there crying.”

Tsamis said she and her classmates got a lot out of the accident and assembly.

“It brings it to the reality of it because we’re never really in that situation, especially at our age because we’re sophomores so we’re not really at that driving age yet,” she said.



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