

Class of 2007 gets sobering lesson in hope of preventing real tragedy

One day before Senior Ball, emergency agencies and a funeral home simulated a DWI crash.

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Emergency crews completely engulfed the four-door Ford Contour, trying to assess the condition of the four passengers.

There was a head-on collision with a car and soon, police would determine the driver of the black Honda Civic hatchback was intoxicated.

The two individuals riding in the back of the Ford weren't in as bad shape, said Deputy Dan Lyon of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, as emergency crews worked diligently to get them out of the car and into the Penfield Volunteer Emergency Ambulance waiting nearby.

"The people in the back seat were cushioned," he

said. "Those in the back seat took the impact."

The driver of the vehicle was suffering from more serious injuries, including broken ribs which were piercing her lungs, causing them to fill with blood and making it difficult to breath. Almost immediately, it was determined that the passenger was deceased, so crews worked around her to help those victims that were still alive.

"She will be the last person who will leave this vehicle," Lyon said to the audience of Penfield High School seniors seated on bleachers in the school parking lot.

It was just a drill, not an actual DWI crash, but as Lyon ominously warned, it could very easily be the real thing.

"Don't think it won't happen to you, though, because in reality, this happens every day," he said. "It can be prevented ... The best times of your life are coming up. You've got to use the head on your shoulders. Please, please, please, think. Prevent this from happening. The life you save could be your own. The life you save could be

that of the person sitting next to you."

Before the drill began, seniors seated on the bleachers chatted lightly about the scene that was about to unfold. Slowly, though, as the mock DWI crash scene began to play out before them, the crowd grew silent.

"I think the fact that you could hear a pin drop in the audience sent the message back to us that this worked and delivered what we hoped it would, which was to show the kids that this doesn't just impact them," said health teacher Terri Finlayson. "It impacts their families, their friends and the people they spend time with on a daily basis."

The activity was coordinated by Finlayson and her twin sister, Julie Verstraete, also a health teacher at Penfield High School. They had help from members of various town and county emergency agencies, including the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, the Penfield Fire Department and Volunteer Emergency Ambulance, Jennings Funeral Home and the Medical Exam-

iner's Office.

Seniors saw and heard in graphic detail about the impact that drinking and driving can have from Lyon and other emergency crew members. They saw how the emergency crews removed bodies and victims from a vehicle in a serious accident. They watched as the windshield and roof of the car were peeled off to gain access to the inside.

Lyon told them what happens after a person is declared dead. Parents are notified and asked to make a positive identification of the body at the medical examiner's office. Officers from the sheriff's office gave the drivers of the Honda a sobriety test and then placed him under arrest.

"This is not a typical crash scene," Lyon said. "This is a crime scene. If someone is hurt or dead, someone's going to have to pay the consequences."

The re-enactment wrapped up with the victim of the crash being taken away in a hearse and a reading of a poem by Mothers Against



STAFF PHOTOS/JACK HALEY

Rachel Mondrick, portraying an injured driver, speaks to a volunteer with Penfield ambulance during a simulation of a DWI crash for seniors at Penfield High School on Thursday.

Drunk Driving.

The drill may prevent the Penfield High School class of 2007 from having to deal with the tragedy caused by drinking and driving, but for the emergency crews, it's a reminder of what they have to deal with all too often, said Don Behner, deputy

director of operations for PVEA.

"This is something that we see all the time that we don't like to see," he said. "This gives them (the seniors) the opportunity to see the consequences of drinking and driving ... If we can save one life, then we've been successful."