

Mock crash has chilling realism

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Students, parents witness consequences that follow bad decisions

As the second assistant chief with the Fredonia Fire Department, Chris Kunstmann has seen his share of grisly accident scenes.

Still, Kunstmann said he couldn't help but be impressed — and even a little shaken — as he watched the mock accident “Dancing with Disaster: A Teen Tragedy” unfold on May 1, the Wednesday before Ozaukee High School held its prom.



“It went awesome. It was amazing how realistic the kids made everything,” Kunstmann said.

More than 100 participants helped stage the mock accident, intended to teach a powerful lesson to teens who can easily get caught up in the emotions surrounding proms and other school events.

A crowd of around 300 students and parents attended what turned out to be a graphic portrayal of the consequences of teenage drinking.

Members of the school's National Honor Society took the lead in planning the event, including posting a promotional clip on YouTube.

The evening started in the high school commons with mother Wendy Hart relaying the pain she experienced when her child was killed in a drunken-driving accident. Emergency room physician Jason Staszko also talked about the trauma of such accidents.

A 10-minute video followed showing students excitedly preparing for a prom. Amid the festivities, one of the students is shown drinking and getting behind the wheel with three friends.

Attention then shifted to the school parking lot, where a gruesome two-car accident was staged.

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One of the student was depicted as having been thrown through a windshield.

Despite the efforts of emergency personnel, including the crew of the Flight for Life helicopter, there was one fatality.

"It was very realistic. The students and parents were really into it. I think it really drove home the point that there are serious consequences to making bad decisions," Kunstmann said.

It was easy for the students to place themselves in the situation portrayed, he said.

"People were really touched. When the girl was arrested for drunken driving, you could see how shaken she was," Kunstmann said. "When they pulled the tarp over the fatality, you could see her mother was really crying."

It had been more than a decade since the school staged a mock accident, and Kunstmann said plans are already being made for ways to improve the next exercise.

Assisting with the mock crash were Waubeka, Belgium and Thiensville fire departments, the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department, Fredonia Marshal's Office and Eernisse Funeral Home. Support was also provided by Auto Parts & Recycling and Bada Bing Pizza.

Students taking part in the simulated fatality were Katie Bares, Ethan Brouillette, Amanda Desimowich, Erika Karrels, Katie Lippe, Colton Susen and Emily Thome.

Image Information: 'DANCING WITH DISASTER' had students and emergency responders interacting during a mock car crash that drove home the message that bad decisions can have fatal consequences.

Photo by Sam Arendt