

For many, driving is a daily activity, not requiring much thought or consideration. However, the sad reality is that according to the US Dept. of Transportation's National Traffic Highway Safety Administration the calendar year 2016 37,461 lives were lost to fatal car crashes. The sad thing? A majority of these deaths all stem from a cause that is completely preventable.

On Thursday May 31, 2018 the Twp of Washington Police Department in conjunction with the Westwood Regional Jr/Sr High School conducted a D.W.I. reenactment for juniors and seniors of Westwood High School of the consequences of driving while under the influence. The Bergen County Prosecutors Office educated the students about the law in regards to the consequences of drinking and driving. After the assembly which not only entailed an educational portion a skit was portrayed by the student's peers of a party with underage drinking that resulted in a fatal motor vehicle crash involving high school students. The students were lead outside to the front lawn of the High School where the crash was simulated with a vehicle on the front lawn of the High School. Rich Tuntigian Owner of Rich's Automotive in Emerson graciously donated the vehicle for this simulation. Emergency Services from Twp of Washington, Westwood and Paramus responded. The simulation consisted of an extrication and hearse brought by Becker's Funeral home for a visual impact on the scenario.

Police Officer Vincent Montalbano of the Twp PD who coordinated the program on behalf of the Twp PD stated *"Our hope is that we can make our teenagers aware of the life changing consequences that drinking and driving will have on them and everyone in their lives. We are not just Police Officers we are their parents, coaches and members of this community. One of the reasons that drunk driving and drunk driving accidents have fallen by ½ in the last 30 years is the message has gotten out: Drunk driving kills thousands of people every year. Governments, public safety organizations, parents and students all have been effective working together to spread the message of the dangers of drinking and getting behind the wheel."*

### ***Who Is Drinking and Driving?***

According to the CDC, drivers from 21 to 24 are the most likely to drink and drive. Generally, younger drivers are more likely to take risks with drinking and driving because the young tend to think that nothing bad can happen to them.

However, the CDC also finds that the percentage of high school teenagers who drink and drive has dropped by 51% since 1991. **Still, almost one million high school teenagers drank and drove in 2011. Teen drivers are still more likely than adult drivers to be in a fatal DUI accident.**

Police Officer Vincent Montalbano stated, *"You might be shocked at some of those numbers. The teenage years often lead to an unfortunate combination of situations that lead to an increased drinking and driving rate. The newfound freedom is too much to handle responsibly and other times it's as simple as peer pressure as archaic as that sounds. Teens usually have a low tolerance for alcohol and combine an inexperienced driver; these factors come together to create a very dangerous situation. Remember when you were a teenager and had a nothing-bad*

***can happy to me syndrome? That's exactly the mentality we want to change with implementing programs like this."***

Both Chief Glenn Hooper of the Twp PD and Chief Michael Pontillo of the Westwood Pd shared the same sentiments on Thursday when honestly discussing the presentation at the High School. Over the course of Chief Hooper's 40-year career and Chiefs Pontillo's 20-year career in dealing with underage drinking and all the associated problems, they both believe that the level of drinking between the ages of 17 to 20 has actually decreased over the last 20 years.

*"All of the efforts we as the Law Enforcement community have implemented over the years, including education, underage drinking awareness programs and heavy enforcement may have helped prevent our young adults 17 to 20-year-old from drinking. Together what our Departments collaboratively have done is helped create a new found, uncensored reality of the association of underage drinking and driving."* (stated Chief Hooper).

*"Simply put, this is a collaborative agreement from both Police Chiefs to continue to make Community Policing issues such as underage drinking a top priority. There are studies, statistics and anecdotal information that show programs exactly like this are reducing the numbers of deaths associated with underage drinking and driving. It strengthens the professional relationship of all of the Agencies involved that it took to make this very program possible. By combining the enforcement power of both Departments, we can maximize our effectiveness, take on every facet of this issue and get the information out to our young people."* (stated Chief Pontillo).

According to statistics, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens. Teen drivers have crash rates three times those of drivers 20 and older per mile driven. Factors contributing to teen driver crashes include alcohol or drugs, texting while driving and not wearing a seatbelt. When asked what his thoughts were on the program Mayor Peter Calamari stated - ***"The DUI Experience presents statistics and safety information in an interactive fashion, encouraging students to share lessons learned with peers, family and hopefully save some lives. I couldn't ask for a better program for our community."***

Police Officer Vincent Montalbano on behalf of the Twp. of Washington Police Dept. would like to express his gratitude to:

Superintendent Ray Gonzales, the administration and faculty at the Westwood Regional school District. The Student Assistance Coordinator Margaret Montenare was crucial in the planning and the implementation of this program. High School Principal Frank Connolly displayed his devotion to the children of our communities by his ability to stimulate strong positive emotions in his students when it came to this program.

The Officers of the Twp. of Washington PD and Westwood PD that volunteered their time and displayed their professional knowledge of the chain of events that occur when a driving while intoxicated incident takes place was essential in this program as well.

The Twp. of Washington and Westwood Volunteer Ambulance Corp Members who performed the demonstration of their response to a incident of this magnitude was amazing.

The Twp. of Washington Volunteer Fire Dept. demonstrated for the students and all of the attendees that they are the main role in ensuring the safety of the victims and securing the scene. They were able to provide a Volunteer Fire Fighter to play one of the victims during the scenario to make it as realistic as possible. The Westwood and Paramus Fire Departments also assisted by standing by for additional resources for a possible medevac transportation by Hackensack University Medical Center Air Med One. Chief Flight Nurse Joseph Solda assisted in providing having Air Med One on standby.

The Twp. of Washington Municipal Facilities assisted with the set up of scene to make it as realistic as possible.

Police Officer Montalbano sincerely thanks all involved to help bring such a detailed demonstration to fruition.



The Twp. of Washington Fire Dept. showcased their response to the scenario which was that they assessed the vehicle and located one party ejected, one entrapped and one occupant with minor injuries. The FD used the Jaws of Life to remove the trapped victim.

