

Chapel Hill High anti-violence group takes fight to toilets

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CHAPEL HILL — Ten years ago Jackson Vogel got into a car with a drunk driver in Charlotte. Hours later, police officers knocked on his parents' door to inform them their son had been killed in a car accident.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Vogel was one of 27 people who die every day from alcohol-related crashes in the U.S.

Yet distilling these deaths down to a statistic can desensitize us, not just to drunk-driving accidents but to all kinds of violence. Students in Chapel Hill and beyond are trying to change that.

Students Against Violence Everywhere (SAVE) was founded in 1989 after a student died attempting to break up a fight at an off-campus party in Charlotte. It now has more than 2,100 chapters in seven countries.

On March 12, the national SAVE summit convened in Raleigh for student leaders to share successful safety and violence prevention tactics.

“It’s a wonderful chance to share ideas, meet positive young people and the adults that work with them, and celebrate the work that SAVE does around the country,” said Jim Wise, adviser for SAVE at Chapel Hill High School and chair of the board of directors for the national SAVE group.

At the summit, students attended breakout sessions and listened to speakers, including Hans Vogel, who shared his son’s story in a speech, “Jackson, What You Have Become.”

The blood alcohol level of the driver that night was 0.19, more than twice the legal limit of 0.08, The Fayetteville Observer reported.

“Hans Vogel’s speech didn’t leave a dry eye at the summit,” said Maggie Adams, senior leader of the CHHS SAVE chapter and member of the SAVE Youth Advisory Board.

‘Toilet Talk’

The theme for this year’s SAVE summit revolved around Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu’s quotation: “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

CHHS’s SAVE chapter is known for “Toilet Talk.” Members brainstorm interesting or eye-catching questions (“Are you going to prom?” or “Is Chipotle your bae?”) to put on fliers in school bathrooms. Once the poster has viewer’s attention, a “reality check” at the bottom of the flier informs him or her of various statistics related to youth violence around the country.

These statistics, drawn from surveys taken annually by students in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school district, may include facts such as “In the last 30 days, 7.1 percent of high school students stayed home because they didn’t feel safe,” or “In the last 30 days, 24 percent of high school students texted while driving.”

CHHS SAVE members led their own breakout session on Toilet Talk during the summit.

“Our session went very well,” said Adams. “Afterward, it seemed like the students who were a part [of it] felt really excited to start something like Toilet Talk in their schools.”

SAVE’s activism has not ended with the summit. Adams and the rest of the members of SAVE at CHHS are looking forward to the weeks leading up to prom, when they will stage a mock car crash to stress the dangers of drunk driving.

“We have all juniors and seniors listen to some speakers about drunk driving, then we have them all go out to the football field where the SAVE students set up a mock crash with a drunk driver,” Adams said.

The process will involve a helicopter, an ambulance, firefighters to rescue the “victims” from the scene, and police officers to arrest the drunk driver.

“It’s a lot of fun and really exciting to get to work with the firefighters and police officers,” Adams said.

What does the future hold for SAVE?

“I’m excited to inspire more freshmen and more members to join and to speak out against the violence,” Adams said.

“I plan on doing (SAVE) for the rest of my years of high school,” said Natalie Hickerson, a freshman member of the club who was inspired to join SAVE by Adams. “I’m excited to see how it goes.”