Learning practical lessons

High school students take part in life-saving seminar

By KYLIE HAWN

The number one cause of death among young people ages 16-24 is automobile accidents, for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which include distracted driving and driving under the influence of alcohol.

Emphasizing the practical lessons of calling 911, Good Samaritan Law and the dangers of distracted driving gave the Huntingdon County 911 Center, the PennDOT District 9 office staff and Huntingdon Borough Police an opportunity to give a presentation to Huntingdon Area High School (HAHS) students Friday to stress how such lessons can be useful in saving lives.

“This initially started as a phone call from teachers asking us to give a lesson on injury prevention and emergency room treatment,” said 911 dispatcher Joe Thompson. “We then realized those things could be covered in classrooms and through other organizations,” and further explained he wanted to give a presentation that could grab students’ attention.

The presentation on 911, given by Thompson, illustrated practical tips for students who need to call 911 for any situation.

“It's all about location, location, location,” said Thompson. “Be aware of where you're at. If you don’t know the physical address, pay attention to landmarks and other things around you so dispatchers can get a good location.”

Thompson encouraged students to stay focused while making a 911 call, as they have the chance to make a difference saving someone's life.

“You are the eyes and ears,” said Thompson.

Calling 911 may prove critical in saving someone's life as a result of alcohol poisoning, and this gave school resource officer (SRO) and Huntingdon Borough Police Cpl. Jeff Buckley a segue to educate students on the state Good Samaritan Law as it applies to underage drinking.

“Statistics show there's been an increase in the number of deaths in alcohol poisoning and binge drinking among teens,” said Buckley. “We're not naive enough to think they won’t be faced with this problem.”

The Good Samaritan Law, as it applies to underage drinking, indicates if someone who is underage has been drinking and is with someone who is in...
need of urgent medical assistance due to alcohol poisoning, they will not be prosecuted if they are the first person to call 911 for help.

“They have to believe they are the first person to call 911,” said Buckley. “They also have to stay with the patient until crews arrive so they can give all information needed until they are cleared to leave a scene.”

Buckley stressed to the teens the law doesn’t give them an excuse to drink.

“This isn’t a get out jail free card,” said Buckley. “It is important for them to feel safe to call for help, but it’s not a ticket to drink underage.”

Students also watched a short video created by high school students from several schools in the eastern part of the state on what they shouldn’t do if they are in a situation where the Good Samaritan Law comes into play.

PennDOT District 9 safety press officer Anthony Scalia used Friday to offer students an opportunity to use a distracted driving simulator to show just how difficult it is to text while driving.

Students, ranging from grades 9-12, went on a simulated drive where they were asked to text and call a “friend” while common obstacles were presented to them. Students were expected to obey all traffic laws while on the simulator.

“We wanted to get them in here to give them an opportunity to use the simulator,” said Scalia. “If they screw up here, they still get to go home. They don’t always have that same opportunity in a real life situation.”

Many observers noticed no students were able to successfully obey traffic laws while on the simulator, especially considering texting while driving is illegal in the state.

Thompson, who helped coordinate the event with borough police and PennDOT, was excited students were engaged and eager to participate in Friday’s simulator.

To learn more about the laws regarding distracted driving, visit www.justdrivepa.org.

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