

BLADE

TOLEDO, OH
SUNDAY 202,085
APR 2 2000



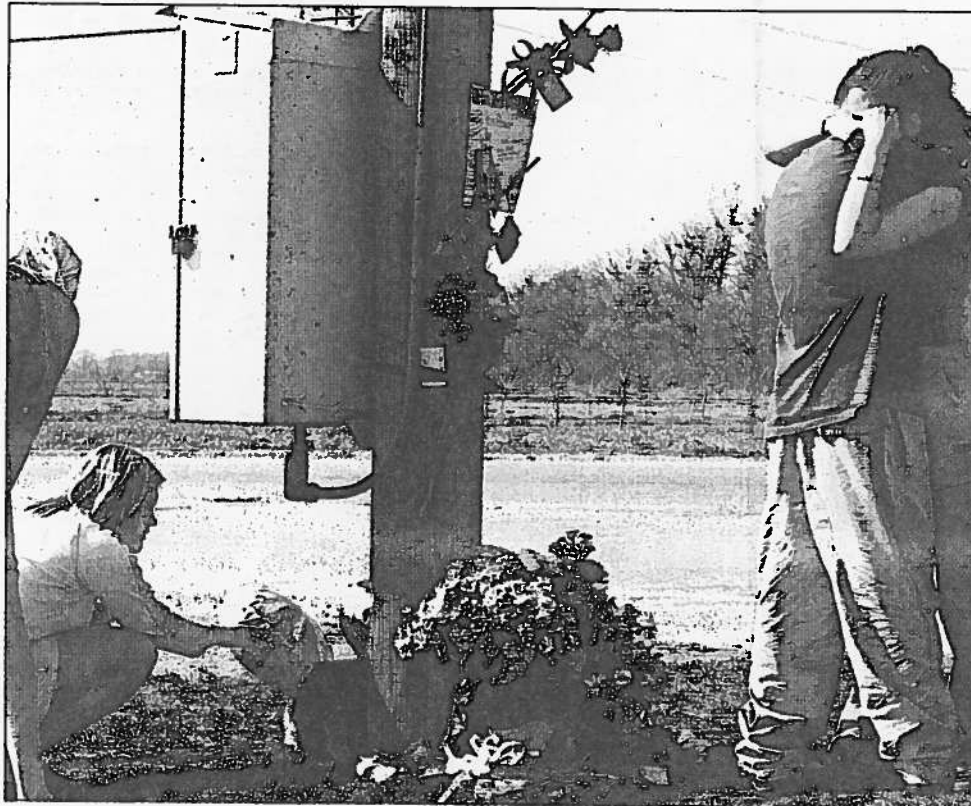
BURRELLE'S

370
.XZ001 66 .b.... E0

SPECIAL REPORT

Underage drinking drops, but teen drivers still dying

4160 FRONT PAGE



BLADE PHOTO BY LIZ BAYLEN

A day after an accident took the lives of three of their friends, teenagers gather at the site to mourn the deaths. The accident on State Rt. 2 involved the common ingredients of youth and alcohol.

Toledo area looks for better ways to fight alcohol use

BY JOSHUA BENTON
and KELLY LECKER
BLADE STAFF WRITERS

As a rule, teenagers do not need much of a reason to party.

But on March 22, there was plenty to celebrate. Gary Walbolt was turning 18.

The celebration would turn deadly within hours for Gary and two of his closest friends. The three spent the evening drinking, then got in a car and headed to nearby Delta.

At speeds estimated at 90 mph, their 1991 Pontiac failed to make a curve, slamming into a pole. All three boys died at the scene. One had a blood-alcohol level three times the legal driving limit.

Many local people shook their heads at the horror of three young lives lost and whispered about how they got the alcohol.

But despite occasional tragedies like this one, underage drinking is not a trend on the rise. Today's teens drink significantly less than their parents' generation did, and teen drunk-driving deaths in Ohio have dropped more than 65 per cent since the late 1980s.

Last Sunday, Ottawa Hills police arrested 13 teenagers at a home on Brittany Road after an underage drinking party. Police said several were unconscious. But even Ottawa Hills Police

See DRINKING, Page 8 ▶

Frankly kids, when they're making choices,

Drinking

► Continued from Page 1

Chief Ron Jornd said he believed such parties had become less common in recent years.

"It's not an out-of-control problem," he said.

While the numbers have improved, teenage drinking is still the No. 1 cause of death among young people. But those trying to fight the problem are struggling to find new ways to bring the numbers even lower.

Two traditional forces against teen drinking — Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) — have run into major problems.

MADD is seeing some of its chapters close because of a lack of volunteers. And DARE faces criticism from many who say it just does not work.

"A lot of people are looking for something new to try, because they're frustrated with the options they have now," said Dr. H. Wesley Perkins, a sociology professor at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in New York and the creator of a new way of fighting teen drinking.

Fewer teens drinking

Underage drinking is not new. Several national studies show that fewer students use alcohol now than teens two decades ago did.

According to the federal government's National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 49.6 per cent of teens age 12 to 17 drank in any given month in 1979. That dropped to 27 per cent in 1991.

In the 1990s, the numbers have leveled out. In 1998, only 19.1 per cent drank.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study limited to high school students shows that about 50 per cent have had a drink in the last month, and 30 per cent have had five or more drinks in one sitting. That is roughly the same number as nine years ago.

"I hate to say it is a constant, but as a student myself in the '70s it was there," said Robin Rayfield, principal of Pike-Delta-York High School, where the three Fulton County teens had attended. "It's a significant problem now, and it probably was back then. Frankly kids, when they're making choices, might not always be making the right ones."

The downward trend has been reported for the Toledo area as well.

Dr. Bill Ivoska, director of admissions at Owens Community College, has studied the drinking patterns of Lucas County public and Catholic school students every

two years since 1990. Over that time, the percentage of high school seniors who say they had had at least one drink over the previous year has stayed steady at about 80 per cent.

The most recent survey, in 1998, featured an across-the-board drop in teen alcohol use, including a drop from 82.8 per cent to 77.3 per cent among seniors. "That was the first time we saw a significant decline," Dr. Ivoska said.

The first alcohol education for most young people comes from Drug Abuse Resistance Education, or DARE. Aimed at fifth graders, DARE is a once-a-week, 17-week course taught by uniformed police officers on how to say no to drugs and alcohol.

It has become an enormous phenomenon, used in all 50 states at an estimated cost of more than \$700 million a year.

But a growing body of evidence suggests that DARE is ineffective.

Dozens of studies, many of them sponsored by law-enforcement agencies, have shown that students who participated in DARE programs use drugs and alcohol just as much as those who did not. A Justice Department-funded study in 1993 said DARE has "a limited to essentially nonexistent effect" on drug and alcohol use.

In Michigan, state police have decided to stop running DARE programs in favor of a new approach called TEAM, or Teaching, Education, and Mentoring.

The switch stemmed from a 1998 survey in which troopers asked schools what they wanted from a police-education program. Educators wanted more about personal safety, obligations as citizens, and the penalties for certain crimes such as drinking and curfew violations. Unlike DARE, TEAM continues through the 12th grade.

"If you know right from wrong, you're not going to use drugs" or alcohol, said Dave Verhougstraete, director of public information for the Michigan State Police.

Even though Michigan's state police have abandoned DARE, most schools in the area still use the program, which in Michigan is now run through Michigan State University. In Ohio, the attorney general gave more than \$3 million to law-enforcement agencies for DARE classes for the current school year.

Since Michigan State Police troopers stopped teaching DARE classes, the Madison School District outside Adrian pays a city police officer to continue the course.

"We think enough of it to pay for it ourselves," superintendent Jim Hartley said. "As long as we have someone who is an effective teacher we will continue to have DARE. I could see if you had someone who couldn't relate to the kids how it might not work."

And other law-enforcement personnel say that the dozens of studies are just incorrect. "We will never give up on a good program, no matter what a few people would say," said Chief Jornd of Ottawa Hills. "DARE has been and will continue to be the front line defense on juvenile drinking."

Others agreed that DARE needs the support of other programs and efforts.

"You can't teach a fifth grader certain skills and then not do anything after that and then expect them to use those skills years later," said Jay Salvage, executive director of Lucas County's Alcohol & Drug Addiction Services Board. "In sixth grade, those kids are pretty adamant about saying 'no.'"

UNDERAGE ALC

After dropping sharply in the 1980s and drunk driving deaths have both

Percentage of American teenagers aged 12 to 17 who reported drinking alcohol at least once in the last month:

1979: 49.6%	1994: 21.6%
1985: 41.2%	1995: 21.1%
1991: 27.0%	1996: 18.8%
1992: 20.9%	1997: 20.5%
1993: 23.9%	1998: 19.1%

SOURCE: National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services

BLADE GRAPHIC

Peop 16 to relat



But that wears off over time."

Holding adults responsible

With DARE's effectiveness on its own in question, area authorities are looking at other ways to combat teenage drinking.

Some police agencies and courts are holding adults more responsible in underage drinking incidents. The Ohio Highway Patrol is still investigating the Fulton County accident.

In Lenawee County, two parents were caught letting teens drink on their property. The couple said they thought it would be safer if the youths stayed in one place when they drank.

District Court Judge James Sheridan disagreed. He said there was no safe or legal drinking by teenagers and ordered the parents to write a letter detailing what they did and why it was wrong. That letter will be distributed to Onsted high school students for the next two years.

"Parents don't think about these things. When they end up in my courtroom, suddenly it doesn't seem like such a swell idea and certainly not as much fun as everyone was insisting it was going to be," the judge said.

might not always be making the right ones.'

It's illegal in Ohio and Michigan to provide alcohol to minors, even your children.

"You got a party with anywhere from 20 to 100 kids and one or two parents there. Are you seriously telling me that those parents have those kids 100 per cent under control?" he said.

Ottawa Hills has gone further than many other jurisdictions in trying to fight underage drinking. "We're not running from burglary to street shooting to murder in Ottawa Hills; so we have time to investigate problems like this," Chief Jornd said.

The village has a mandatory arrest policy for teens caught drinking, and it has established a diver-

passed resolutions asking parents to pledge they will not participate in the sleepovers.

An Ottawa Hills parents group called CHOICES, or Choosing Healthy Options is a Community Effort, was formed several years ago to combat underage drinking. The group helped convince village officials to hire a substance-abuse coordinator to work in Ottawa Hills schools.

"If anyone is going to stop this problem, it has to be the parents," said Kathryn Royen, the group's chair.

In the past, CHOICES has tried to educate parents and students on the consequences of drinking, and has even asked village parents to sign a pledge that they support keeping their children alcohol free.

Schools continue to do their part, often including lessons about underage drinking in their health curriculums. Others prevent athletes caught drinking from playing sports.

Many schools try to show students what it would be like to lose their friends to drinking with mock accidents and speakers who have been hurt or lost people to underage drinking and drunk driving.

Schools are bearing more of the task of teaching students lessons of underage drinking as more parents work longer hours, educators said, but it is not likely students will stop drinking from a few hours of instruction in school.

"We have too much responsibility in this," Mr. Hartley said. "It's not the issue in homes that it should be. Too many parents are too busy. Alcohol problems happen in every type of family. But they are less likely to happen in a family that knows where the child is and who their friends are."

MADD losing volunteers

Since its formation in 1980, Mothers Against Drunk Driving has been one of the major forces fighting underage drinking and drunk driving. MADD helps victims of accidents and works to strengthen drinking laws. The national chapter amended its mission statement last year to include the prevention of underage drinking.

But as drunk-driving deaths have dropped, so has the number of MADD volunteers. As a result, some chapters have closed or are near closing.

The problem is not money: Corporate sponsorship of MADD is at an all-time high, said Judy Mead, the executive director of MADD Ohio. But there are not enough volunteers to use that money. Many women are working now and can't dedicate themselves to the group full time, and other volunteers have left for other causes.

For example, the chapter in Putnam and Allen counties has only

five active members, and they have had to carry the burden so long they are thinking of closing down. The group is meeting at 7 p.m. tomorrow at the Vaughnsville United Methodist Church in Vaughnsville, O., for one last recruiting effort.

For the first time, in December, the chapter was not able to hold its annual candlelight vigil. Last month, the group canceled an annual banquet to honor police officers who stop drunken drivers. Work that it has done with victims and their families is threatened if the meeting tomorrow is unsuccessful.

"Everyone thinks MADD is there, it's OK, and they don't realize there's a problem," said Marilyn Miehls, the victim's advocate for the Allen/Putnam County MADD chapter. "It has been such a good, strong force for all these years, it would be a shame to see it dwindle away."

In Highland County in southern Ohio, the chapter has struggled with membership, at times coming close to disbanding.

"You get three or four people doing all the work, and it kind of gets overwhelming," Paulette Hackathorne, the Highland County president, said. "I finally went around to friends and said, 'You're not going to have a MADD chapter unless people get involved.'"

If an area doesn't have enough volunteers to have a full-fledged MADD chapter, it can have a community-action team instead. Community-action teams have their budgeting and the majority of their paperwork done by MADD's state office.

Defiance and Williams counties started a MADD chapter in 1992, but they changed to a community-action team five years later.

Toledo's MADD chapter disbanded in 1995 after feuding with the national headquarters over the spending of money on equipment. In 1998, Marcia Owens and Debbie Holmes started a community-action team.

Nationally, leaders said the key might be to recognize the need to involve entire families in the work.

The group has plans for a new elementary-school curriculum for first through fifth graders on alcohol. But without volunteers, the organization's entire mission is threatened.

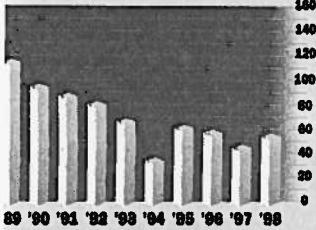
Ms. Holmes, of the Toledo chapter, said that while the group has gotten some able volunteers, some others are reluctant to join the cause.

"It's sad because it's such an important message," she said. "You would think more people would get involved because it is drinking and driving."

OHOL USE

and early 1990s, teen drinking eveled off in recent years.

le killed in Ohio by drivers aged 120 who were at fault in alcohol and crashes:



ICE: Ohio Department of Public Safety

sion program to make arrested teens perform community service and go through an education program on alcohol abuse.

Ottawa Hills has a special program that allows parents leaving town to leave their house keys with the police department. The parents sign a form giving police permission to enter their house at any time they believe there might be underage drinking going on inside.

"Parents are able to tell their kids the cops are involved, and then the kids can tell their friends, 'Hey, we're pretty apt to get arrested if we do anything,'" Chief Jornd said.

Chief Jornd added that the owner of the Britany Road home had given the police his keys in the past but had not last week when the 13 arrests were made.

One Ottawa Hills tradition — the senior sleepover in tents in someone's backyard on the night before the first day of school — came under scrutiny in the mid-1990s as some students began to drink alcohol at the event and show up at school with hangovers the next day.

In 1995, two parents were cited in court for allowing the drinking to happen. Since then, the school board and the village council have

Drinking

▶ Continued from Page 8

Teaching 'social norming'

Perhaps the most promising new idea in fighting underage drinking comes from a small school in upstate New York and has its roots in sociological and psychological theory.

The central fact behind the idea, called social norming, is that young people, no matter their age, have a big misconception: They think that their peers are doing much worse things than they actually are.

And the more common students think drinking and drug use is, the more likely they are to do those things in an attempt to fit in.

"If only 35 per cent of college students are exhibiting high-risk drinking, those same students will think that 70 per cent are," said Dr. Perkins, who developed the social norms method at tiny Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, N.Y.

Dr. Perkins' idea is simple: If you inform students that most people their age do not snort cocaine, shoot heroin, or get drunk every night, they'll be more likely to avoid those behaviors.

"It's a way of getting peer pressure to work for you instead of against you," Dr. Perkins said.

Anguished media reports stating that underage drinking is a growing problem are part of the problem, he said, creating the perception that high-risk behavior is just part of being young.

"The facts are that alcohol use declines markedly in these age groups, starting in the mid-1980s, and deaths on the highway have come down markedly. Kids aren't drinking more, and things are certainly not getting worse."

The centerpiece of a social norms campaign is a coordinated effort to publicize the facts. From putting up posters to holding focus group sessions, counselors attempted to inform students that not drinking was normal.

Eighteen months after instituting the social norms method at Hobart and William Smith, students were surveyed again and asked about their alcohol habits. This time, the number of high-risk drinkers on campus dropped 21 per cent. Negative effects of drinking — from missing class and property damage to unprotected sex — dropped between 30 and 40 per cent.

While those numbers are self-reported,



Marilyn Miehls and David Voth are nearly all that is left of the Allen/Putnam County MADD chapter, which may close.

Dr. Perkins said evidence from residential counselors and others who see alcohol-related problems on campus convinces him the drop was real.

Dr. Perkins spends much of his time now speaking at conferences and trying to get other colleges and universities to use his method. Several have, including the University of Arizona and Western Washington University, both of which saw double-digit drops in high-risk drinking in only two years.

In northwest Ohio, Bowling Green State University has adopted a social norms approach and has had success with it.

Dr. Terry Renter, an assistant professor of journalism who has been studying student-drinking habits for eight years, said that over the last two years, high-risk drinking — defined as five or more drinks in a row — has dropped 2.5 per cent at BGSU, at a time when the national num-

bers have gone up more than 4 per cent.

Dr. Rentner said that the university's program is about to expand into local high schools. Later this month, she will visit three local high schools — St. Francis de Sales in Toledo, Woodmore in Elmore, and Eastwood near Luckey — where she will implement the social norms program.

More than 20 other schools have expressed interest in the program, she said.

"Letting [high school] seniors know what to expect about college drinking can help an enormous amount in getting them ready," Dr. Rentner said.

The work schools such as BGSU are doing has not gone unnoticed. Last week, BGSU, Hobart and William Smith, and five other colleges and universities were named model programs in alcohol abuse prevention by the U.S. Department of Education. Each school received a \$74,000 grant to further their efforts. Four of the

seven schools use the social norms approach.

But some educators, torn by deaths such as the ones in Fulton County, think that teenagers will only get the message about drinking when they are confronted with the damage it can do first hand.

The friends of Gary Walboit, Jim Sustaita, and Joe Knapp will not soon forget what can come from underage drinking. Gary and Jim's funerals were held Monday in the high school they had attended.

Gary had been with his friends all day the day he died. His mother, Pam, said she came home from work just in time for a 10-minute birthday visit before Gary darted out the door of his Delta home again to meet Jim.

Gary and Jim had been best friends for years. There was no question they would celebrate this milestone together. Jim's dad, Wallace, knew that too, when his 18-

It's a way of getting peer pressure to work for you instead of against you. 9

Dr. H. Wesley Perkins
creator of 'social norming'

year-old son said good-bye as he stepped off the porch that night.
"This had been in the works for awhile," he said.

Friends and family are not sure where the teens spent that evening. Wherever they were, they had been drinking.

Late that night, Gary and Jim made their way to a friend's house on the edge of nearby Swanton. At some point Joe joined them there. Police would later find that Joe had been drinking too and had a blood alcohol content of 0.31 — more than three times the legal driving limit.

An argument started between one of the young men and a woman who lives at the house, said Marissa Coale, a friend who lives nearby. The woman called 911, but by the time police arrived the teens had already driven off, back toward Delta with Jim behind the wheel.

Within minutes they would all be dead.

Amy Noel, a Bryan resident, was driving on State Rt. 2 toward Delta about 11:30 p.m., when a car came speeding up behind her at close to 100 miles per hour, trying to pass. Ms. Noel pulled over to let the car pass. She told troopers she saw the driver pass two more cars and nearly hit an oncoming vehicle before the car disappeared around a curve west of Swanton.

She thought the car had sped miles ahead, but when Ms. Noel rounded the curve, she saw something the community won't soon forget. The car was turned over and wrapped around a utility pole. Its roof was crushed to the floor, with the boys trapped inside.

"This could happen somewhere else, and we'd read it in the paper or see it on TV and sit back and say, 'That is really tragic,'" said Robin Rayfield, principal of Pike-Delta-York High School, which the three boys had attended. "Then we'd think, well, it doesn't happen here. Well, now it did happen here. And our hearts were broken."

Blade staff writer Brian Dugger contributed to this report.

BLADE PHOTO BY DIANE HIRSH