

August 2007
Immediate Release

Night of the Living Dead

The Oceanfront Inn Comes Alive To Assist in “Every 15 Minutes” Teen Drinking Education Program

One night last month, Virginia Beach’s Oceanfront Inn filled with the Living Dead; walking, talking teenagers who “died” earlier in the day from a simulated alcohol-related car accident.

The exercise brought home the sobering fact that, every 15 minutes, someone dies from an alcohol-related auto collision. A national program by the same name, The Every 15 Minutes Program, offers real-life experience without the real-life risks. This emotionally charged event is designated to dramatically instill teenagers with the potentially dangerous consequences of drinking and driving.

The Oceanfront Inn has partnered with Virginia Beach law enforcement officers who are certifiably trained Every 15 Minutes instructors to educate youth about the dangers of drinking and driving.

The family-owned hotel offered the dozens of participating “Living Dead” students, chaperones and police officers a place to regroup after the day’s events, write letters to their parents about their experience, and be separated from family and loved ones overnight.

“We are very concerned with the safety of our community,” says Oceanfront Inn owner, Andy Vakos. “Potential victims of alcohol-related car accidents include employees of ours or family members of employees, our guest, our friends, and our loved ones. We want to do what we can to help support this program and the valuable educational lessons it provides.”

The program is offered throughout the year. Last month, it was held at Virginia Beach’s Bayside High School.

During the first day events, a police officer dressed as the Grim Reaper calls students out of classrooms while another police officer enters the room to read an obituary which has been written by the “dead” student’s parent(s), explaining the circumstances of



their classmate's death and the contribution the student has made to the school and the community.

Later, the student returns to class as the Living Dead – complete with white face make-up, a coroner's tag and wearing a black tee-shirt. From that point on, the Living Dead students do not speak or interact with other students. Police officers also begin notifying parents of the Living Dead about the student's demise at their home or place of employment.



“A car is more dangerous than most people think,” says Joshua Thorp, a rising senior at Bayside High and one of the Living Dead. “Young people should consider what their chances actually are when they drink and drive, because it's not good.”

“This is a very effective program. It takes you through every process that is made in case an accident happens. It's a real serious thing.”

After lunch, a simulated traffic collision is viewed by students on school grounds. Rescue workers treat injured student participants. A visiting coroner handles fatalities on the scene, while injured students are extricated by the Jaws of Life and transported to the hospital. Other students go to the morgue, while others are taken to the police department jail for the purpose of being booked for “drunk driving.”

At the end of the day, the participating students are transported to the Oceanfront Inn for an overnight student retreat. The retreat simulates the separation from friends and family.

Students first gathered in the Oceanfront Inn's restaurant, Elliott's, and began one of the most powerful parts of the program, where they wrote letters to their parents starting out with ...

“Dear Mom and Dad, every fifteen minutes someone in the United States dies from an alcohol related traffic collision, and today I died. I never had the chance to tell you ...”

“The idea is to write the letter and get emotions going,” said Master Police Officer Jim McElligott. “We want them to really think about the consequences. It becomes a very emotional evening, many of the kids were bawling like babies in there.”

“It was a good experience at the Oceanfront Inn,” Thorp says. “It was very emotional. Many people cried. But I think it was good to have the evening away from our parents, for that separation.”



The Every 15 Minutes event carried over to the next day when the Living Dead students return to school and a mock funeral is held. The Living Dead act like ambassadors to pass along their experiences to other students, in the hopes that drunken driving accidents diminish.

“This is a wonderful program,” Vakos says. “To walk throughout the hotel and see the students coming to grips with these important issues, thinking about their own mortality and how it affects their family and friends, it is a powerful thing.

“I am glad Oceanfront Inn can support the Every 15 Minutes program.”

#