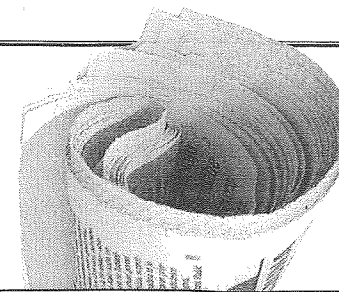


# Community



**GOOD MORNING!**

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**JOSE VIAC**

**SOUTH ELGIN**

## Students hear hard facts on alcohol

**BY ERIN CALANDRIELLO**  
Staff Writer

**SOUTH ELGIN** — Nearly a decade ago, David Emigh of Geneva decided to drive down to St. Louis with his friend, Amie Titus.

The pair, both 21, partied at Laclede's Landing, a shopping, restaurant and bar area in downtown St. Louis. Afterward, Emigh, who had been drinking, decided to get behind the wheel.

Emigh was driving southbound in the northbound lanes of Interstate 55 about 4:45 a.m. on July 25, 1998, when his car collided head-on with a northbound auto. Emigh's passenger, Titus, and the two people in the northbound car were killed.

Emigh pleaded guilty to three counts of involuntary manslaughter. Even though each count of involuntary manslaughter carries a maximum sentence of seven years in prison, Emigh was put on five years' probation. He served five months in prison after violating his probation.

This tragedy touched the ears of seniors at South Elgin High School on Tuesday morning as it was recounted during the Renz Addiction Counseling Center-sponsored anti-underage drinking town hall meeting.

Students, staff and the public heard representatives from the Kane County Coroner's Office, Kane County State's Attorney's Office, the Illinois Alcohol Drug Dependence Association and Renz Center discuss the details, effects and prevention methods of underage drinking.

"It's not a joke," said Coroner Chuck West. "You feel you're the exception to the rule and it's not going to happen to you."

When some students started laughing during the presentation, West said, "This is part of the problem — your attitude. You don't have any idea what this (drinking) can do to your life."

"It may seem like a fun thing, but when you're standing next to a dead body, it's not fun," he said. "I've seen too many young people kill their best friend under the influence of drinking or drugs.

### Alcohol abuse facts and figures

- April is alcohol awareness month.
- Warning signs of alcohol abuse include drinking to calm nerves, forget worries or boost a sad mood; guilt about drinking; unsuccessful attempts to cut down or stop drinking; lying about or hiding drinking habits; causing harm to oneself

or someone else as a result of drinking; needing to drink increasingly greater amounts in order to achieve desired effects; and feeling irritable.

- In Kane County, the alcohol- and/or drug-related deaths of people between ages 14 to 20 has risen in the past three years. In 2005, there were three deaths. In 2006, there were six deaths. In 2007, there

were 11 deaths.

- In Kane County, the alcohol- and/or drug-related deaths of people 21 to 25 has fluctuated in the past three years. In 2005, there were nine deaths. In 2006, there were three deaths. In 2007, there were 14.

*Source: Renz Addiction Counseling Center and Kane County Coroner's Office*

It's something you will not forget for the rest of your life.

"The consequences legally don't even come close to having your best friend or girlfriend die because of your actions. It's (drinking and driving) a stupid decision that ends up with young people not being able to fulfill their dreams or achieve their hopes for the future."

South Elgin High senior, Jessica Villagomez, said that not

getting in the driver's seat after drinking "should be common sense but it's not. I don't understand why some kids just don't get it."

But her senior classmate, Garvin Thomas, explained.

"You can sit here all day long and lecture us and tell us not to drink and drive but the reality is until it actually happens to a young person are they going to get it," said Thomas. "But it's

true, your decisions affect not only you but others around you."

"What I don't understand is if you're going to drink, why drive?" Thomas asked. "Don't go and drive, stay at the house or wherever you're at. It's not worth it."

For more information about prevention or treatment, contact the Renz Addiction Counseling Center at (847) 697-1221.