

Attleboro Sun Chronicle

Mom's message: Don't drink, drive

BY STEPHEN PETERSON SUN CHRONICLE STAFF

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Dr. Carolyn Roy-Bornstein, a pediatrician and mother of a survivor of a traumatic brain injury, addresses students Wednesday night at North Attleboro High School. (Staff photo by Mike George)

Son's life changed in 2003 after he was hit by a hit-run drunken driver

NORTH ATTLEBORO - It was an emotional real-life story that resonated Wednesday night with North Attleboro High School students about the dangers of drinking and driving.

Carolyn Roy-Bornstein, a Haverhill pediatrician and mother of a son who suffered serious brain damage in a drunk driving accident, spoke before more than 100 members of the school's chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions, or SADD.

Roy-Bornstein, representing the Westboro-based Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, told of how her son, Neil, then 17 and a senior in high school, and his girlfriend were hit by a drunk driver in 2003 while walking in Newburyport.

The girlfriend, 15 and a high school sophomore, died the next day after her parents allowed her to be taken off life support.

Neil suffered a broken leg, skull fracture and bleeding of the brain. He spent five years in therapy, and even had to learn to walk again.



Dr. Carolyn Roy-Bornstein, inset, a pediatrician and mother of a survivor of a traumatic brain injury, spoke Wednesday night at North Attleboro High School.

Despite learning problems, Roy-Bornstein said her son - who before the accident had a perfect score in the SATs in math - managed to graduate from high school and college, worked as a teacher and is now in a graduate degree program.

"I'm grateful and very proud of him," Roy-Bornstein said, adding that she celebrates what he has been able to do despite a brain injury that caused severe depression.

"It changed Neil's life forever," she said.

The hit-and-run drunk driver is in prison, having violated his parole after serving a few years, she said.

Roy-Bornstein reminded students of the social host law, where parents can be held responsible, even if they are not present when there is underage drinking in their home.

"They can be sued, and you can end up homeless," she said.

"Drunk people don't make good decisions. It's not just about drinking and driving," Roy-Bornstein said.

"What it comes down to is it's all about choices we make."

The speaker cited a statistic that almost 5,000 people under 21 died of alcohol-related incidents in one year.

Afterward, students praised the presentation.

"I thought she was a great speaker, insightful, with a real life example," senior Forrest Soule said.

"It shows how actions affect people's lives," added fellow senior Anthony DiGiantomaso.

SADD meets monthly and has different activities, including guest speakers but had never hosted Roy-

Bornstein, said Becky Rice, a history teacher and adviser to group.

"Hearing a personal account will really have an effect on the kids," she said.

Roy-Bornstein, who still lives in Newburyport, regularly speaks before high school and college students and civic groups and is also a medical and literary writer. Her memoir about her son's injuries, "Crash," will be published in October 2012.

In Massachusetts, more than 44,000 people sustain brain injuries each year from accidents and violence, and many may be prevented by seat belts, helmets and common sense, according to the Brain Injury Association.

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