

Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers

Date: December 1, 2004

To: The Chapel Hill Town Council

From: The Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers

Re: Underage Drinking and Drug Use in the Town of Chapel Hill
Agenda Item for Council Meeting December 6th

Contacts: Dale Pratt-Wilson #942-3300 and Isabel Geffner #932-2826

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Throughout the United States, adolescents use drugs at alarming rates, with more than half of youth (54%) trying an illicit drug, 60% trying cigarettes, and 80% consuming alcohol before they finish high school (Monitoring The Future Study, Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman, 2002). The American Medical Association reports:

Underage drinking is a factor in nearly half of all teen automobile crashes, the leading cause of death among teenagers.

Alcohol use contributes to youth suicides, homicides and fatal injuries—the leading causes of death among youth after auto crashes.

Alcohol abuse is linked to as many as two-thirds of all sexual assaults and date rapes of teens and college students.

Alcohol is a major factor in unprotected sex among youth, increasing their risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases.

CONSIDER THESE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS ON TEENAGERS:

- * Any amount of alcohol or drugs, including marijuana, is illegal and can result in a loss of driver's license, school suspensions and significant lifelong consequences including but not limited to a police record.
- * Impaired judgment can lead to regrettable or dangerous situations such as fights, falls, drunk driving and promiscuous sex.
- * 43% of those who start drinking at age 13 are at risk for alcoholism as compared to 10% of those who wait until 21.
- * Alcohol impairs the brain in areas that regulate those executive functions critical for learning, decision-making and judgment.
- * Alcohol use results in worse scores on vocabulary, general information, memory and memory-retrieval tests.
- * Alcohol delays the maturation process and can lock-in adolescent-like responses into adulthood.
- * Alcohol can effect bone density and bone growth.

- Marijuana impairs the ability of the brain to store new information and reduces motivation.
- Marijuana impairs finely controlled or coordinated movements involved in athletics or playing music.
- Marijuana slows the immune system response and can cause a sense of anxiety, fear, or panic.

UNDERAGE ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE IN NORTH CAROLINA

In North Carolina, rates of drug use for high schoolers mimic national rates, but rates for middle school youth are particularly worrisome; recent surveys reveal that past-30-day use is 20% for alcohol, 18% for marijuana, 15% for inhalants, with 14% reporting they have been solicited on school property (North Carolina Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2001). This data is of concern since research has determined that the earlier youth experiment and use alcohol and other drugs, the more likely they are to compromise brain development, school success, and a healthy future.

The figures cited above are the reported norms for middle school and high school students in Orange County's two school districts with up to 5% of middle school students also reporting use of cocaine. Additionally, 72.8% of Orange County children seen by OPC Mental Health in F/Y 2003 received a Substance Abuse diagnosis. (This figure does not include those Orange County children seen by other providers--or those children who were not seen at all.) Furthermore, the recently-released 2003 Orange County Health Assessment, compiled by the Health Department, recognizes adolescent substance abuse as one of the most often cited priority concerns in the community.

THE PROBLEM IN THE TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Measuring the extent of underage alcohol and substance use and abuse in the Town of Chapel Hill involves gathering related indicators. In addition to the figures cited above from OPC, we know that the Chapel Hill Police Department charged 103 youth with possession of illegal substances in F/Y 03-04 and cited 18 youth for possession of fake IDs. The Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools reported that 5% of its school suspensions during the 02/03 school year were for Possession of Illegal Substances.

Most telling are the results of last year's Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), developed by the Center for Disease Control and administered in school districts around the country. CHCCS administered the survey to 8th and 10th graders whose parents signed a consent form agreeing to their participation. This self-selected group revealed alarming rates of

self-reported use, rates that often out-paced the nationally norms. (Attached is an overview of some of the more concerning statistics.)

STRATEGIES THAT WORK

Research by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) shows that successful programs aimed at improving the public safety of a community's young people must incorporate three science-based strategies:

1. Reduce the availability of alcohol:

The most documented principle in alcohol use prevention is this: Make it harder for young people to get alcohol, and they will drink less. Communities can make alcohol less available by promoting responsible adult behavior and holding adults accountable when they provide alcohol to minors; by raising the price of beer, wine, and liquor; or by reducing the number of places where alcohol is sold or served.

2. Improve the effectiveness of law enforcement:

Communities can better enforce policies designed to stop drinking among children and adolescents. Studies find that existing laws regulating underage drinking are often not enforced. When these laws are ignored, it not only enables young people to drink, but also communicates a general indifference.

3. Change social norms:

Children draw conclusions about alcohol-related social norms from what they see and hear about alcohol in their families and communities. These norms strongly influence their own attitudes and behaviors regarding alcohol. When communities consistently prevent underage access to alcohol, publicize and enforce alcohol-related laws, and limit the promotion of alcohol, they reinforce the message that alcohol use by young people is unacceptable.

THE COMMITTEE FOR ALCOHOL AND DRUG FREE TEENAGERS

Working on the Solution:

The Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers is confronting the epidemic of underage drinking and drug use and its consequences on the lives of the young people in the Towns of Chapel Hill and Carrboro. We believe that this crisis is a public safety issue requiring bold action and collaboration with our community leaders. We must join forces and form partnerships to work towards the common goal of preventing underage

drinking and drug use throughout our community. The only way to achieve true change is through a broad-based coalition that includes:

- * Families (parents & teenagers)
- * Educators
- * Law enforcement
- * Medical community
- * Businesses
- * Elected officials
- * Community organizations
- * Regulators

The Committee's History:

The Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers was organized in May 2004. Our immediate mission was to produce and promote three community-wide forums to publicly address this growing epidemic. This was successfully completed on October 26th and the details are listed below. (Video copies of each forum are available to council members.)

Forum #1 was held on August 23rd at Town Hall in Chapel Hill.

Approximately 150 people attended, and many talked candidly about the problem from different points of view. Students, parents, town officials, school leaders, judges, state reps, drug and alcohol abuse professionals all had something to offer. Some talked from personal experiences, some offered abuse statistics, and others discussed past efforts to combat this societal menace. But no matter what perspective was presented, everyone unanimously agreed that the problem of teen drinking and drugging? in our communities is real and it is serious.

Forum #2 was held on September 27th at the Carrboro Century Center.

It was designed to understand police and school efforts to combat this crisis. Panelists consisted of Chiefs Jarvies and Hutchinson along with the two high school principals, Mary Ann Hardebeck and Dave Thaden. The format of this event was a Q&A and there were approximately 170 attendees including parents, students and many other community leaders and professionals.

Forum #3 was held on October 26th at Town Hall in Chapel Hill.

This forum discussed the Committee's initial recommendations for parents, schools, law enforcement, youth and asked the attendees to provide input and make their own recommendations in each category. (These recommendations are included in this packet.)

Endorsements and Support:

The Committee's three forums received community-wide endorsements from:

- * Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School District
- * East Chapel Hill High PTSA
- * Chapel Hill High PTSA
- * Durham Academy
- * Chapel Hill Police Department
- * Carrboro Police Department
- * Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce
- * Harris, Inc - Budweiser
- * The Community Backyard
- * Pa'lante
- * Healthy Carolinians
- * Adolescent Substance Abuse Providers Network
- * Chapel Hill High School's Drug & Alcohol Awareness Task Force

Private citizens have come forward and contributed more than \$1,500 to the Committee for its efforts.

State and local community leaders actively participated with parents, teenagers, and concerned citizens in the three sponsored forums:

STATE LEGISLATURE

Joe Hackney
Ellie Kinnaird
Verla Insko

STATE OFFICIALS

Mr. Michael Eisen, Director of Substance Abuse Services, Department of Health and Human Services

CHAPEL HILL TOWN COUNCIL

Jim Ward

JUSTICE SYSTEM

Judge Joe Buckner
Peggy Hamlett
Beverly Scarlett

POLICE DEPARTMENTS & ALE OFFICERS

Chief Gregg Jarvies
Chief Carolyn Hutchison
Jim Huegerich

SCHOOL SYSTEM

Elizabeth Carter, School Board Chair
Lisa Stuckey, School Board
Jamezetta Bedford, School Board
Neil Pedersen, Superintendent
Stephanie Willis, Health Services Coordinator
Mary Anne Hardebeck, Principal CHHS
Dave Thaden, Principal EAST
All Middle School Principals
All High School Student Assistance Counselors

PARENT ORGANIZATIONS

East PTSA President and Board Members
Chapel Hill High PTSA President and Board Members
Durham Academy Parent Association Members

UNC

Dr. Fulton Crews, Director, Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies
Bill Renn, *Director*, UNC Health Care's Alcohol & Substance Abuse Program
Dean Blackburn, Coordinator of the Substance Abuse Program for Student Health Services.

Accomplishments to Date:

Since the formation of The Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers 6 months ago, many accomplishments have been realized. They range in scope from broad community-wide conversations about the issues that reach all town residents through newspaper and radio coverage to specifically focused achievements, most recently the successful institution of breathalyzers at the annual Thanksgiving Day dance sponsored by Chapel Hill families. Below is a fuller list of the Committee's achievements to date.

- * More than 30 articles about/related to activities of this Committee have appeared in local newspapers (Chapel Hill News, The Herald, Daily Tar Heel and the N&O. This coverage included news reports, newspaper editorials, and committee-member guest columns.)
- * The Committee's Forums have been covered by local television news and interviews with Committee members have aired on local radio stations.
- * The state office of Substance Abuse Services has come to the Committee with an offer of ongoing support.
- * Several nationally recognized research organizations including Innovative Research and Training, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, and Duke

University's Center for Child and Family Policy have come forward with technical assistance support for the Committee's work.

- * The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce has agreed to launch a campaign with business owners who sell alcohol to display signs clearly stating that they will not sell alcohol to minors.
- * Three Town Forums involved more than 450 attendees in an open dialogue about the problem of underage drinking and drug use in our community.
- * Concerned community members have donated financial support for the Committee's work.
- * For the first time in 40 years, the Thanksgiving Holiday Dance organizers agreed to implement the use of breathalyzers at this year's dance.
- * Key UNC offices including Student Health and the Alcohol and Substance Abuse Program have stepped forward to be involved in the Committee's work.
- * The Committee has appeared before the high school's School Governance Committees with recommendations regarding substance use prevention, awareness and action.
- * The Committee has met with the School Superintendent and key school system administrators to offer feedback to the school district's proposed revised Substance Abuse policy.

REFERENCES--National and Local Resources

Below is just a handful of references that illustrate the broad national and local commitment to community coalitions to combat the prevalence of underage drinking and drug use.

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America

www.cadca.org

CADCA is a national organization that supports local communities' efforts to create safe and healthy environments.

Partners to Reduce Underage Drinking in North Carolina

www.initiative.org

Partners to Reduce Underage Drinking in North Carolina is a statewide coalition of law enforcement, public health professionals, parents, youth, public leaders and retailers

concerned about the health of young people who are committed to reduce underage drinking through community involvement and social change. The vision of the group is a network of collaborative, self-governing partnerships, each with a strategic focus on underage drinking. Collectively the partnerships address the major issues of alcohol marketing, access, and high-risk use by youth. Partnerships employ an environmental approach concentrating on social norms and policy change at all levels: local, regional and statewide.

Minneapolis, Minnesota: Project Northland

www.epi.umn.edu/projectnorthland

Project Northland is a multilevel, multiyear program proven to delay the age at which young people begin drinking, reduce alcohol use among those who have already tried drinking, and limit the number of alcohol-related problems of young drinkers. Project Northland strives to change how parents communicate with their children, how peers influence each other, and how communities respond to young adolescent alcohol use.

Athens, Ohio: TEAM

www.ruralaction.org

TEAM (Together Erasing Alcohol Misuse) Athens County is an organization dedicated to reducing underage drinking in conjunction with the Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Services board (317 Board) of Athens, Hocking and Vinton Counties.

Miami, Florida: The Miami Coalition for a Safe and Drug Free Community

www.miamicoalition.org

The goal of the Miami Coalition For A Safe And Drug-Free Community is to reduce substance abuse by 50% among local youth over the next decade by addressing the factors that place Miami -Dade County young people at risk for substance abuse

Sonoma County, California: Drug-Free Communities Project

www.sonoma-county.org

The Drug-Free Communities Project is a project of the Sonoma County Health Partnership. The Partnership is comprised of representatives from the community, law enforcement, schools, non-profit agencies, and local government. The major goal of the Drug-Free Communities Project is to reduce alcohol and marijuana use by middle school youth in Santa Rosa, Cloverdale and Rohnert Park/Cotati.

Cobb Underage Drinking Task Force

www.cudtf.org

A Cobb County, Georgia Task Force is a community / law enforcement partnership comprised of various organizations; concerned parent and youth groups, numerous public

and private agencies, responsible alcohol retailers, civic organizations, and all law enforcement agencies within Cobb County committed to reducing underage drinking in the county.

Texas Safety Network

www.texassafetynetwork.org

Community organizations, PTAs, parent groups, cities, counties and neighborhoods across Texas are confronting the problem of underage drinking and its consequences. The Texas Safety Network supports these efforts to prevent and reduce illegal underage alcohol consumption and to curb the terrible toll underage drinking takes on our society.

YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY RESULTS (YRBS)

...a national survey administered by the Center for Disease Control (CDC)

Chapel Hill Carrboro City School Results 2003-2004

Survey Questions	Middle School Students	High School Students	National Averages
	6-8 th grades	9-12 th grades	9-12 th grade
Drug abuse is a problem in their school	30.30%	69.20%	na
Report someone offered, sold, or gave them drugs on campus during the previous 12 months	16%	44.40%	28.70%
Had one drink on school property in the last 30 days	not asked	10.20%	na
Smoked marijuana on school property in the last 30 days	not asked	8.20%	na
Have ridden in a car where the driver had been drinking	23.9%	26.9%	30.2%
Have consumed alcohol in the last 30 days	18%	51.90%	44.3%
Had five or more drinks at a time in the last 30 days	not asked	30.80%	27.1%
Have used marijuana	9%	50.70%	40.2%
Have used inhalants	9%	10.40%	na
Have used cocaine	2%	8.20%	8.70%
Have used LSD	not asked	11.20%	na
Have never had alcohol	not asked	26.30%	na

RESULTS OF COMMUNITY INPUT AT FORUM #3
(items in bold are Committee generated recommendations)

Recommendations & Goals related to parents/families:

1. **Develop a media campaign aimed at parents & children communicating that violators of ETOH laws will be prosecuted**
2. **Establish a parent-to-parent-to police-to-schools network of communication that alerts to parties, violators, etc.**
3. **Organize a resource list of organizations that offer parent education and find a way to make this info available the public**
4. Organize educational opportunities for parents to learn about setting limits (curfews, substance use)
5. look at underlying problems as to why there is substance use and abuse
6. Encourage children to join faith-based youth groups
7. Find parents to monitor school problem areas like the pond and the woods
8. Establish high risk (ADD & ADHH) support groups
9. Each school create a small committee to coordinate workshops, forums, panel of parents, who are positive role-models
10. We need to share the results of these recommendations with not only schools but YMCA, Parks & Rec, after school programs, street scene and places where kids hang out.
11. Get the k9 dogs to sniff the parking lots where kids hide their drugs
12. More dances sponsored by parents 3-4 a year --drug and ETOH free
13. Continue the dialogue with quarterly newsletter updates
14. Get the PTSA's involved
15. Speak to faculty at each middle and high school to encourage support
16. Get students on board in a significant and important way
17. Create some kind of a teen after-school program for kids whose parents are not at home

Recommendations & Goals related to town policies/law enforcement:

1. **Enforce the underage drinking laws by citing children who break the law,**
2. **As well as those who aid and abet**
3. **Rigorously monitor retail establishments whose sell to minors**
4. Find out how our town police integrate with UNC police.
5. Deal with gang and drug activity and prevent it from being here in Chapel Hill
6. Make petitions to the local governing bodies
7. SRO's are very effective...should we pay them more or have more?
8. Don't forget another venerable population -the disabled. Looking for peers sometimes in the wrong places
9. Too much policing emphasis. Even strict parents have kids in trouble. We're not helping kids enough with finding their talents, strengths and social skills. They come to rely on drugs and ETOH to 'find' themselves and bond with their peers...truly arresting their development
10. Don't allow underage kids into bars

Recommendations & Goals related to schools:

1. **Actively communicate district policy and consequences for A/D use to all parents and students and hold all accountable**
2. **Eliminate sale/use in campus**
3. **Make it a priority to train teachers to recognize symptoms and develop an user-friendly reporting protocol**
4. **Each middle and high school should develop a school-based A/D task force charged with monitoring enforcement of school policy**
5. Tie participation in school activities to adherence with the school A/D policies.
6. Increase the efficacy of canine dogs on school grounds
7. Use undercover cops on campus
8. Do random drug-testing for athletes and others who are participating in clubs, etc
9. Close school campuses at lunch
10. Start earlier in the school years to give info out
11. Don't ask teachers to monitor A/D use
12. Don't prevent participation in extra-curriculars tied to A &D use (don't adhere to the school policy)
13. Coaches need to talk more about it at the beginning of the sports year
14. School dances need to start early and end early
15. Value of relationship building with the SRO's; fund this
16. Focus prevention programs in the middle schools
17. Continue "life skills" in early grades and middle schools
18. Need a team of SA counselors at both high schools
19. Intense SA prevention training for school student assistance team members
20. Participation in the team approach...fully parents, law and schools
21. Parent volunteers to be present on campus to monitor A &D use.
22. Continue to use the sober in season contract signed by student, parent and coach
23. Continue prevention programs from elementary school through middle school

Recommendations & Goals related to kids:

1. **Create format (forum, focus groups, etc) to bring young people together to make further recommendations**
2. Teenage peer group to discuss these issues (forums/sleepovers)
3. Involve young in faith-based youth groups
4. Participate in group at OC Dispute Settlement Center
5. Consider participation in youth AA meetings
6. Create a forum to discuss and get input for new district SA policy
7. We are bored in school and we learn faster than this
8. ADHD is on the rise
9. Many of us self-medicate because we are depressed and need something to make the pain go away...there is more pressure than ever
10. After school is my most vulnerable time
11. Internalize and self-monitoring of non-use..."own" their own paths in life
12. Encourage talents and interests other than sports

Miscellaneous Goals and Recommendations:

1. Work with businesses who sell ETOH to take a stand on this issue and publicize their position.

Group shines spotlight on teen substance abuse

Chapel Hill parent heads effort to educate community on issue

BY KAYCE T. ATAIYERO
STAFF WRITER

CHAPEL HILL - On a nice night last May, Dale Pratt-Wilson rolled into an apartment complex looking for some action.

She'd heard in school that there would be a party going on at the complex. And sure enough, Pratt-Wilson found a rowdy happening: teenagers sitting on car hoods smoking pot and milling around with plastic cups in their hands, clues to the keg waiting inside.

But Pratt-Wilson was not your average high school student looking for a little fun on a Friday night. She's a parent who wanted to see firsthand the kind of partying that some teenagers in town were doing.

"It was an 'everybody's invited' party' and I am an everybody so I went," she said.

She got there on the heels of the cops. The 200 or so teenagers in the crowd scattered, running to their cars and sending out warning signals to their friends over cell phones.

In the chaos, a cause was born. Pratt-Wilson decided something needed to be done to curtail underage drinking and drug use.

"That's when I snapped," she said. "I thought, 'No, this can't be. We cannot let these kinds of things go on.'"

Pratt-Wilson started the Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers, which aims to prevent teen substance abuse by changing community attitudes. She said part of the reason why the problem exists is because too few parents take a stand.

"It is not just a town problem, or a school problem. It is a parent problem. There is a lot of looking the other way," she said. "The norm is, 'Well, all right, they are drinking. I did it and I turned out OK.'

"You have to give a new message to

IF YOU GO

WHO: Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers

WHAT: Public forum on teen substance abuse

WHEN: Oct. 26 at 7 p.m.

WHERE: Chapel Hill Town Hall.

Among the topics will be forming a parent network.

the kids to say I care about you."

The committee is holding a series of public forums on teen substance abuse. On Monday night, the group held a question-and-answer session where parents could get feedback from Chapel Hill Police Chief Gregg Jarvies, Carrboro Police Chief Carolyn Hutchison, Chapel Hill High School Principal Mary Ann Hardebeck and East Chapel Hill High School Principal Dave Thaden.

More than 150 people showed up to gain insight and hear suggestions on combating the problem. Parent John Ager said the discussion was informative.

"I think all parents are concerned ... or should be concerned about it," he said.

Pratt-Wilson agrees. In many ways, she said, parents are the first line of defense.

"I think they are the people who have the most power to influence their children," she said.

Hardebeck, the Chapel Hill High principal, said the forum was a good way to encourage parental involvement in preventing teen substance abuse.

"I certainly think it is a step in the right direction in terms of getting parents involved and creating a partnership with schools and law enforcement," she said. "Parent cooperation and support is essential, because we

all want our kids to be healthy and safe and make informed decisions."

Parent Nancy Smythe said she thinks Pratt-Wilson's efforts are "fabulous." She said she knows of parents who allow their children to drink and said there is a need to change attitudes.

"It is very long overdue. Even the smallest baby steps we can make in stopping our kids from engaging in risky behavior is great," she said. "I just think Dale Pratt-Wilson is a hero."

The committee is planning another forum Oct. 26 at 7 p.m. at Chapel Hill Town Hall. Among the topics will be forming a parent network.

Pratt-Wilson said the goal would be "to have parents all over town saying that teenagers are not allowed to go to parties where there is drug and alcohol use and put pressure on parents who allow that."

Jarvies, the Chapel Hill police chief, said Pratt-Wilson is brave to try to tackle teen substance abuse.

"It is a tough issue that a lot of people have ignored in the past, not out of any lack of concern about the issue but more about the assumption that nothing can be done," he said. "She is taking what would be in a lot of people's minds an unpopular position."

Over the summer, there were a few instances of vandalism at Pratt-Wilson's home. Someone came by periodically and scattered beer cans on her lawn.

But she said she has not experienced open opposition to her cause. She welcomes debate on the issue.

"I'm not deterred. I think that I am able to keep my eye on the ball, which is about saving the lives and potential of young people," she said. "I think that it is worth it."

Staff writer Kayce T. Ataiyero can be reached at 932-2004 or katalyer@newsobserver.com.

Chapel Hill turns a blind eye to teen-age drinking

Why would nine women gather at Breadmen's Restaurant during the heat of the day in early August?

Because the grilled cheese sandwiches are excellent at this esteemed Chapel Hill dining emporium. But also because the women are sick and tired of an age-old Chapel Hill problem - teenage drinking - and they're not going to take it anymore. The women, most of them parents of high schoolers, were called together by Dale Pratt-Wilson to plan a campaign against teenage substance abuse.

Some would say you might as well plan a campaign against tropical storms on the Outer Banks. They're going to happen anyway. But Pratt-Wilson is the latest incarnation of that distinctly Chapel Hill type, the passionate crusader, and she's a mom on a mission, fired by a single outrageous incident. What stoked her pipes was a

party that occurred back in May, when some 125 of our best youth found their way to an apartment on East Franklin Street. The party was unsupervised, there were kegs of beer and in Pratt-Wilson's words, "the area reeked of the odor of marijuana."

Cops were called, kids skedaddled, and the party flowed elsewhere. It's a not uncommon scene in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, one that the parents at last week's meeting will tell you occurs every weekend - no supervision, plenty of alcohol and drugs, ineffective police enforcement. "What we have is a huge out-of-control problem," said Lynne Johnston, one of

EDITOR'S DESK



Ted Vaden

the women at the meeting. "It is so hard to be a student at the high school who does not use." The problem is not a new one, says Jim Huegerich, crisis counselor at the Chapel Hill Police Department, although he questions whether it's every weekend. "It's nothing new as far as the issue goes," Huegerich said. "Normally, it's the parents go out of town, the kids have a couple of friends over and it turns out to be a huge party."

The phenomenon happened at my home once, I'm embarrassed to say, and I can think of a prominent local politician struck by the same perfect storm - high school kids, parents out of town, illegal substances. Just recently, a neighbor left his teenage son at home over the weekend with permission to have a few friends over for dinner. That cookout among friends quickly metastasized into an out-of-control fracas

with beer, fighting and, by the end of the evening, police. Is this inevitable, a rite of growing up in a college town? The women at last week's meeting say it doesn't have to be that way, and they're determined to do something about it. With the blessing of police, town and school officials, they have organized a series of three to four community forums to explore the problems and causes of teenage substance abuse and to generate solutions. The first forum will be Monday, Aug. 23, at 7 p.m. at Chapel Hill Town Hall.

An impossible challenge, you say? Well folks said the same thing 12 years ago, until the number of deaths and injuries on prom and graduation nights reached an unacceptable level. That's when a group of parents, just like those at Breadmen's last week, decided to create an alcohol-free community-wide graduation

bash called Project Graduation. Last June 12, my daughter attended Project Graduation along with 600 other high school students, and it was definitely in the place to be that night. I can say that I was one grateful parent to know that she was celebrating in a supervised, safe environment, even if she didn't come in until 4 a.m.

Pratt-Wilson is a shrewd observer of the anthropology of parent-teen relationships in Chapel Hill/Carrboro. Here are common attitudes she says parents adopt that foster an unhealthy environment:

- It's okay as long as they don't drink and drive.
- Kids are going to experiment, so I'd rather they did it here in the house with me, in a controlled way.
- Learning to be responsible about drinking requires that they drink.
- They're going to do it

anyway when they go off to college.

■ I trust my kids to do the right thing. (thus I can leave them home alone on a weekend.)

■ My kids would be so mad at me (and never tell me anything again) if I turned ir one of their friends.

■ We did it and turned out okay.

Sound familiar? I'm not sure I disagree with some of these rationalizations; I've heard myself saying them. But whether you agree or disagree I think our underlying assumptions about raising teenagers in this time and place warrant challenging. A Huegerich says, "Anytime yo get a group of folks passionate about safety in the community I would endorse it. I'm glad to see folks having the staying power. I'm glad to see folks trying to have better results. So am I. See you Aug. 23.

... mind of human intervention in nature

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OPINION & OUTLOOK

Alcohol, drugs policy needs to change

BY DALE PRATT-WILSON

Several months ago, we began a long-overdue conversation. This conversation evolved from the public recognition that a serious drug and alcohol problem exists among Chapel Hill-Carrboro teenagers.

Guest
column

This recognition developed into a series of community forums, intended to identify the depth of the problem and to consider possible solutions. As we examined the

respective roles and factors that contributed to the problem of teen substance use, we heard from students, parents, law enforcement, educators, legislators, judges, mental health and substance abuse professionals, and many interested local and county officials.

We quickly realized the multi-dimensional nature and complexity of the problem, and that all of us share differing levels of responsibility and accountability with the solution found in a collaborative approach involving families, schools and law enforcement. However, the conclusion is inescapable: whatever approach we have been using to this point is failing badly.

I commend The Chapel Hill Herald for its interest in this issue, and recognize its continuing importance as a critical component in informing and educating the public. However, your editorial comments of Nov. 1 ["Use flexibility with teen drinking"] lead us to believe that you misunderstand the interests and intention of the Committee for Alcohol and Drug-Free Teenagers regarding the role of law enforcement in its unique area of responsibility.

As reported by the Herald, the Chapel Hill Police Department adopted a policy of not citing or charging middle or high school teens for violating state drug or alcohol laws. This policy was allegedly influenced by one or more prior city administra-

tions, who held the view that Chapel Hill parents do not want their children policed aggressively regarding their use of alcohol or drugs.

The Police Department, presumably at the urging of city officials, asserts that it is enforcing "community norms." Our committee fundamentally believes that this policy, at best, is seriously misguided and flawed, and, at worst, is a contributing factor to the worsening abuse problems by our children. It is noted that no such prohibition or "norm" exists to prevent local law enforcement from charging offending university teenagers for similar violations.

The Police Department does not explain who determines so-called "community norms," but it is certain that community residents had no majority voice in determining this standard. But we believe that the "community norm" standard is not set by the Police Department or city government, but is, instead, set by the General Assembly of North Carolina.

This standard set by the General Assembly applies to every North Carolina community equally and without exception. So far as we can determine, Chapel Hill is the only community in North Carolina to adopt a Police Department policy of not enforcing state law regarding the use of drugs or alcohol by children.

Our committee strongly urges the Town Council and the Police Department of Chapel Hill to discard this failed policy of non-enforcement of state law.

Obviously, it is not working. At some point, as the problem continues to worsen, it is necessary to recognize the need for a different approach. However, we know that our Police Department has many responsibilities, of which the enforcement of drug and alcohol violations by children is only one.

We are certainly not advocating that the Police Department devote all of its resources to this issue, or that the city adopt the absolute "zero tol-

erance" policy you suggest. To the contrary, our goals are not punitive.

Instead, our objective is to keep our children safe and away from a life compromised by alcohol and drug use. Too many teens and parents in this community have already learned this hard lesson and we will not sit by idly while the life or potential of another child is lost or compromised.

We consider the citing or charging of offending youth to be one of a multitude of options available to police and others in attempting to stem the rising tide of alcohol and drug use by children. However, the refusal by the city to use this option, under some misguided and confusing notion that it violates some "community norm" in which the community had no voice, is unacceptable.

By their refusal to consider the enforcement of state alcohol and drug laws by children, they have removed a possible deterrence option from our effort. It is obvious that the lack of enforcement is not lost on the beneficiaries of this police policy.

The Chapel Hill Police Department, under the capable leadership of Gregg Jarvies, is a very fine department. Our complaint is not about the department, but is about a failed and ineffective departmental policy that is in need of recalibration. Effective law enforcement includes the possible use of all resources and tools at its disposal. Such options are a police mainstay in deterrence.

The Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers is not proposing inflexible or rigid enforcement, nor do we support tying the hands of our police department. To the contrary, we want law enforcement to have every flexibility option possible, including the currently non-existent option of authorizing its officers to cite or charge high school teenagers for violating drug and alcohol laws.

Dale Pratt-Wilson is the founder of the local Committee for Alcohol and Drug-Free Teenagers.

Town shouldn't squander opportunity to help teens

GUEST COLUMN



Neal Friedman

parents, teens and "officials."

Among a range of activities and community efforts undertaken by the committee was a petition made to the Town Council in September that essentially asked the council to partner with the community to help reduce substance abuse by teens. The committee also requested stronger enforcement of laws concerning alcohol sale and consumption.

In response to the petition, the town manager stated in a memo to the mayor and Town Council dated Oct. 11, some local and national statistics gathered from high school students strongly suggest a serious problem, perhaps a prelude of epidemic proportion in the opinion of some. The town manager correctly pointed out in his memo the genuine cooperation of the Chapel Hill Police Department and Chief Gregg Jarves in particular.

The town manager further agreed that the problem of substance abuse by teenagers deserves community attention. In view of the heightened awareness of this issue, it would seem that nearly all members of our community would agree this matter has risen to the level of being recognized as a public-safety issue.

Given the extent of the problem, together with national statistics that indicate the degree of the problem has increased substantially in communities across the nation over the past

10 to 15 years, past practices and attitudes no longer are adequate in view of today's reality. Virtually all of the members of our community are affected by teenage substance abuse, as roads become unsafe when impaired drivers are behind the wheel and classroom experiences are adversely affected when students with altered states of consciousness dilute the efforts of committed teachers and students.

The manager's memo identified some actions that are a continuation of current practices:

- "Continue to notify all parents or guardians of teenagers identified at parties where alcohol is present"
- "Continue funding by the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools for school resource officers in all Chapel Hill secondary schools."

His memo also referenced some general comments on possible initiatives without offering much in the way of specifics, which regrettably is a reminder of the many empty campaign promises with which we are all too familiar.

- "Work with state legislators to increase funding for more substance abuse treatment facilities in Orange County and for hiring additional Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) officers."
- "Partner with the committee and community agencies to support efforts to increase parental involvement."
- "Work with the committee to develop a program that promotes the importance of parents meeting their teenagers at the door as they arrive home after an evening out."

Many members of the community believe that a bolder and more courageous effort is called for by the leadership of Chapel Hill, with specific and tangible actions and targeted time frames for implementation. Laws need to be enforced and enforcement can effectively serve as a deterrent for some. Local judges have told the community that citing

teenagers will not result in rampant criminal records and ruined futures, as they are extremely mindful of this unintentional outcome.

First-offender programs are available with the possibility of records being expunged. Counseling, intervention and treatment efforts need to be properly funded in both the school system and the community at large. Parents need to understand their potential liability if they choose to support, condone or "look the other way" with regard to underage drinking.

The community needs to provide desirable alternative activities for teens who report "there isn't enough to do in Town." A more serious respect for the extent of the problem, and a correspondingly serious attitude and commitment to address the problem needs to be in evidence.

The committee has been told that the Town Council is largely responsible for establishing community norms. Chief Jarves has said that previous aggressive efforts to pursue teen drinkers have been met with "a lot of flak," and that because police respond to "community norms," parents must convince the Town Council that Chapel Hill residents are ready for a crackdown. The chief also stated, "We are prepared to change the policies people want us to change."

However, no one of authority seems to be able to answer the all-important questions about who is in possession of the data from which town leaders then determine what the "community norms" will be, and when the data, its interpretation and the "community norms" themselves last were updated and reviewed. Vague and generalized explanations by town leaders about following current "community norms" begins to feel very unlike representative government.

The status quo in dealing with this issue is clearly not delivering good results. The

health and well-being of our community's teenagers are at stake. Bold initiatives by our town leaders are called for—bolder than encouraging parents to become more vigilant and responsible, and bolder than renegeing the existing funding burden that falls on the already limited budget of the schools to provide for on-site police officers.

Yesterday's "community norms" are in desperate need of revisiting, including a legitimate mechanism to identify the current view of Chapel Hill and Carrboro residents on this issue, rather than for town leaders to merely "divine" what is right for the masses.

As elected officials, the mayor and members of the Town Council are accountable to the citizens of this community. This issue warrants considerably more attention than studying the various aspects and impact of different types of leaf blowers in the community, or how to regulate the use of air brakes by large trucks.

Many hope that town leaders don't squander this opportunity, given the recent increase in community awareness about this critical topic as evidenced during the past few months. Rest assured that our teenagers will be watching... as will the voters.

Neal Friedman is managing director of Abnantis Real Estate Services Company.

Students 'over-achieve' in drug, alcohol use

As the newspapers recently reported, Chapel Hill-Carrboro high school and middle school students significantly outperform

GUEST COLUMN



Ronald E. Bogle

national school averages. Before patting ourselves on the back for a job well done, you should know that I am not referring to academic performance, but, instead, to their over-achievement in the use and abuse of alcohol and controlled substances.

Recently, a portion of our students (parental consent required) participated in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a nationwide study administered by the national Center for Disease Control. Among its findings, on national average, 5.2 percent of high school students admit to the use of marijuana/alcohol on school property in the last year. However, 10 percent of Chapel Hill-Carrboro students admit to such usage — twice the national average.

Nationally, 28 percent of high school students confirm that they were offered, sold or given drugs on school property in the last year. In Chapel Hill-Carrboro schools, the student average is a stunning 44 percent (incredibly, 16 percent of our middle school students admit being offered, sold or given drugs during that time).

Nationally, 45 percent of high school students acknowledge the use of alcohol within the last 30 days, while 52 percent of our high school students and 18 percent of our middle school students admit such usage. Nationally, 28 percent of high school students confirm having five or more drinks of alcohol in a row (defined as "binge drinking") within the last 30 days, while 31 percent of Chapel Hill-Carrboro high school students acknowledge such abuse.

As undesirable as our statistics

may be, it seems that they are understated, and that, in fact, the problem is actually worse than reported. Because not all students participated, survey takers readily acknowledge that the statistical data for Chapel Hill-Carrboro students is conservatively reported. Students appearing before a recent issue forum sponsored by the Committee for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Teens openly ridiculed the results, contending that the problem is far worse than stated.

While we applaud their academic success, we note that Chapel Hill-Carrboro schools are doing a very poor job monitoring drug and alcohol activity on school property. For all the reported drug-alcohol presence and usage during the school day, school disciplinary figures support the conclusion that enforcement is extremely lax to non-existent. It appears that our high schools are a far cry from the publicly mandated drug- and alcohol-free safe havens. Some parents have even removed their children from our school system, determining them to be unsafe from sad personal experience.

It is clear, however, that this is a community problem, of which the schools are only one component. To be sure, it is a complicated issue, with many weak or failing components: lax law enforcement, unconcerned or approving parents (including those who willingly provide alcohol to their children), local merchants who knowingly sell alcohol to minors, emerging Chapel Hill gangs and other criminal elements motivated by economic incentive — the list continues.

As a judge for many years, I frequently dealt with teens charged with alcohol- and drug-related offenses. It is certain that such experimentation by youth did not originate with this generation. However, with the continual societal lowering of the bar, the depth of this problem has become profound. Ten or 15 years ago, I would have been shocked to disbelief to learn of a drug-addicted

or alcohol-dependent 12- or 13-year-old child. Today, while I remain shocked, I am no longer in disbelief.

The health risks posed to our children from their abuse of alcohol or controlled substances (including the more recent fad of over-the-counter medications) are too numerous (and well-known) for this column. But it is important to acknowledge that alcohol is a powerful mood-altering drug that significantly affects the mind and the body. In my experience, drugs and alcohol seduce the user, particularly those lacking adequate judgment and coping skills, to act in unpredictable and undesirable ways.

Alcohol usage by teens is regularly associated with accidents, suicides, violent behavior, high-risk sex and emotional problems. According to the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, individuals who begin drinking alcohol as teens are four times more likely to become alcohol dependent than those who wait until adulthood.

Does this mean that every child using alcohol or drugs will become dependent or addicted? Absolutely not. But are you willing to risk your child to find out whether the quality of their life will be taken over or compromised by use of such products? The parents of drug-addicted or dependent children also thought they were asking the right questions and doing the right things for prevention.

This is a quality-of-life issue that can carry profound consequences far beyond the moment in which these young lives exist. It is time to disabuse ourselves of the "no big deal" mentality, and to seriously challenge this problem. The life you save may be that of your own son or daughter.

Ronald E. Bogle is a retired Superior Court judge who continues to serve as an emergency judge. He is a member of the Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teens.

Combating teen drug, alcohol use

For more than 25 years there has been a serious problem with alcohol and drug use among local teenagers. The problem has become progressively worse each year. In January 2003, the Chapel Hill High School Drug/Alcohol Task force was formed.



Peele

Through hard work and enthusiasm, this group has assiduously studied the problem, and consulted with a multitude of parents and experts. It has also organized meetings and seminars where many of those concerned with substance abuse by teens have coalesced and come together. The numbers of people who have helped are legion. I will here mention only five: Linda Hammock, Lynne Johnston, Alice Carlton, Steven Cory and Gloria Dildy

Then along came Dale Pratt-Wilson. She witnessed a teenage party where more than 100 kids were present — most of them drinking or using drugs. It was a sorry sight. After checking with others, she realized this was not an unusual event, and she wanted to do something about it. So she has brought together another group, called The Committee for Alcohol and Drug Free Teenagers. They proposed three town meetings on this subject.

The first town meeting was on Aug. 23.

Many people spoke. People were not only talking about the gravity of the problem, they were also making suggestions.

One suggestion is that more teen centers be built. This is partly in response to statements by teenagers, who said they drank and did drugs because there was "nothing else to

do."

Yet we could build many more teen centers, and it would not stop the drinking. The excuse given by teenagers that they drank because there was "nothing else to do" is misleading.

Members of the court system spoke at the meeting and assured the group that they take the problem very seriously and intended to prosecute teenage alcohol and drug violations with vigor. Yet we could have the toughest court system in the state, and it would not stop the drinking or drugging.

The Task Force has helped the school system to deal with the drug and alcohol problem more directly. The school administration assures us that its efforts at discipline will be unflagging. Yet we could have more strictness and more police officers in the schools and it would not stop the drinking.

There was also an impassioned plea for more treatment facilities. This is certainly needed. But we could have several more treatment facilities and that would not stop the abuse of drugs.

Alcohol and drug treatment programs are expensive, and sometimes are unsuccessful. Addiction is a chronic disease: treatment is not a "once and done" issue. Rather, it is an ongoing process with no quick fixes. Just as soon as one person is successfully treated, two more addicts will appear.

All of these suggestions are valid. But they will not work until we create a climate that helps young people see a better life without drugs or drinking. This is a change in attitude. This includes a change in the way we parent our children.

In the past I have heard many speakers say, "We must win the war against drugs!"

This attitude will not work. When-

ever you war against something, it produces a counter-attack. War is obsolete. It is not the drugs and alcohol in and of themselves that are the problem.

We must work together and help parents understand that they can help teens understand that there is a better life for them — a life free of drugs and alcohol.

This will be a happier life for them, one that is more fulfilling and joyful. We are friends and neighbors, not enemies.

To this end, the task force has produced a remarkable document. It is titled "Parent Power," and is only 14 pages long.

It first explains how endemic the problem is. Then it outlines some prevention strategies that are practical and clearly written. It explains about setting limits and awarding privileges. It goes into supervision of driving and curfews. It gives warnings: some red flags that will alert you about substance abuse. And then it sets out a parent pledge, which is very helpful to parents who are trying to prevent teenage drinking and drug use.

I am very enthusiastic about this document. It is clear, useful, well thought out and practical.

Most of all it, it reminds us that parents have the power to stop drug abuse.

Copies of "Parent Power" will be distributed at the CHHS open house on Tuesday and at the next public forum on Sept. 27 at the Carrboro Century Center at 7 p.m. Soon you can download it at www.chccs.k12.nc.us/chhs/daaft.

It's free!

Stanley Peele serves as an emergency judge throughout the state. Readers can contact him c/o The Chapel Hill Herald, 106 Mallette St., Chapel Hill, NC 27516. Linda Hammock, student assistance specialist at Chapel Hill High School, contributed to this article.

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Parent forum spotlights teen drinking issue

Parents, school administrators, public officials pack first public session to air 'disturbing little secret' in Chapel Hill.

By Patrick Winn
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — A group bent on spotlighting what they call a "grossly understated" teen drinking and drug-use problem opened a campaign to

address the issue at a forum Monday night packed with public officials, reformed addicts and concerned parents.

For almost three hours, the Committee for Alcohol and Drug-Free Teenagers held an icebreaker of sorts. A who's who of officials — principals, state House representatives, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools Superintendent Neil Pedersen, Chapel Hill Police Chief Gregg Jarvis, and judges — gathered with parents to trade perspectives on teen substance abuse.

There were personal accounts, one from a mother who spent a horrific year dealing with her cocaine-addicted teenager. Others were more distant, coming from judges who've put offenders in jail.

"This is a long overdue conversation about the use of alcohol and drug-use by teenagers," said Dale Pratt-Wilson, who was inspired to start the committee after dropping by a high school keg party in May. "What kind of stand can we make?"

According to a May youth behavior

survey sponsored by the federal Centers for Disease Control:

■ 82 percent of Chapel Hill high school students drank alcohol in the last 30 days, beating the national percentage by 7 percent.

■ 44 percent of high school students and 16 percent of middle school students offered, sold or gave away drugs on school property in the last year.

■ 10 percent of high school students smoked pot or drank beer on school property in the last year.

The real percentages are likely high.

er, said Chapel Hill-Carrboro district health coordinator Stephanie Wilson because only kids whose parents signed off on their participation were counted. In total, about 234 students were surveyed.

"Is this the big pink elephant sitting on the cafeteria lunch table?" Pratt-Wilson said.

First to speak Monday night was a mother who declined to reveal her name. Her son's roller-coaster experience

See TEEN DRINKING, Page A10

Quiet time for reading program

I missed the fun that came with the controversy. This year's UNC-Chapel Hill Summer Reading Program

escaped the public attention that came during the last two years. Two years ago, with its selection of "Approaching the Qur'an":

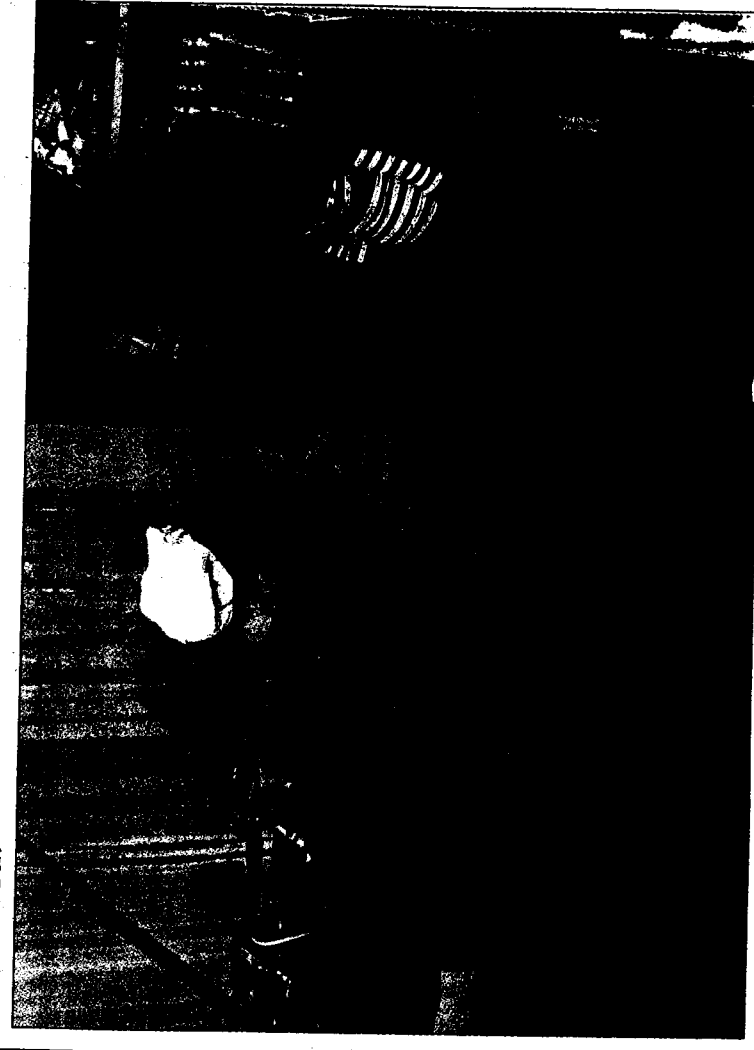
VILLAGE VOICES



D.G. March

The Early Revelations" by Michael Sells, the university had to deal with criticism from politicians and religious leaders who said it was improper for a public university to be teaching (or

Ambushed!



Girls' night ends in tragedy for teens

Weekend accident on court road kills one, injures another.

By Patrick Winn
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — The back-to-school slumber party was be a celebration of the girls' 17th year of high school.

The girls, who'd gone through three years of school at Chapel Hill High as friends and classmates, gathered at the home of 17-year-old Carolyn Walker for an evening of camaraderie and games.

When they discovered that the popular game Catch-Phrase was

who's so smart."

But Johnson doesn't call herself a brilliant student — she's a little nervous about her course load this fall as a pre-med student.

"I'm just normal," she said. "I just put in a little extra work."

And she is hoping to use her age to squeeze in a few more years of graduate school before she turns 30.

"I want to be a doctor. I think it's like 8 to 10 years of school. If it's like 10 years then I'll only be 26 and I'll be making a good amount of money and be pretty stable," she added.

With a sister who is only a year older and a senior at Cedar Ridge High School, Johnson said she naturally has had older friends. And she plans to make many more.

"I'm a big fan of meeting people and getting to know people," Johnson said. "I'm so excited about the next chapter in life."

Cheryl Johnston can be reached at 932-2005 or cherylj@nanda.com

Teen drinking

continued from page A1

ence with drugs in 2001 — soon after he graduated from East Chapel Hill High — nearly ended his life.

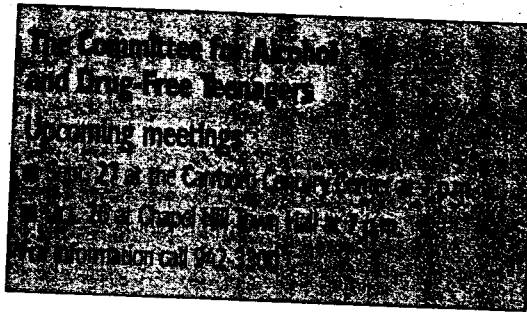
He first abused Percocet, a painkiller he was legitimately prescribed, before graduating to heavier narcotics, she said. Repeatedly, he dodged his parents' attempts to place him in a treatment center.

Christmas Eve of 2001 was the worst night of her life, the mother said. In a moment of clarity, the son decided to detoxify and handed over his cocaine and needles to his dad. But he later decided against the plan and was willing to get the drugs back at all cost.

"He tried to kill me three times that night," she said.

After cleaning out his system, the son was treated and has since become a bookstore manager in Florida, she said.

"If you think your kids are



using drugs, trust me," she said. "They are."

A former East Chapel Hill High student, Mike Tyrrell, said the statistics on abuse — especially on campus substance abuse — are inaccurately low. Parties are rampant, he said, and kids just move along if cops break one up.

"If you stop a kid one night, it's not going to end the problem," he said.

When one mom asked the panel how to bring all this up to her son, Chief District Court

Judge Joe Buckner stepped up to the microphone. Explain quite clearly, he told her, that getting cited for possession of drugs or alcohol would probably suspend her son's license, the most cherished of teenage privileges. That should be a deterrent to both high school students and their parents, he said.

"What does that mean for parents? They'll be driving them everywhere," he said.

Monday's forum succeeded in its mission, to "discuss a very disturbing little secret that goes

on in Chapel Hill," Pratt-Wilson said. But she hopes the next meeting — scheduled for Sept. 27 at the Carrboro Century Center — will invoke fewer questions and more solutions.

There, Pratt-Wilson said, she hopes to turn the spotlight towards town, police and school district officials. She wants the decision-makers to form a panel. Parents would pose the questions.

Chapel Hill Mayor Kevin Foy and Carrboro Mayor Mike Nelson weren't at Monday's meeting, but both said they'll consider participating.

"We're aware that citizens are stepping forward with a problem," Foy said. "I think what's going on right now is an excellent step in the right direction."

The committee's second meeting is scheduled for Sept. 27 at the Carrboro Century Center at 7 p.m. The third, slated for Oct. 26, will be back at Town Hall.

Contact Patrick Winn at 932-8742 or pwinn@nanda.com

SAVE TODAY!

20%

20

Teen watchdog panel finds there's work to be done

By **PAUL WYNN**
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — Six months ago, some parents decided Chapel Hill's attitude toward teens getting drunk or high was dangerously laissez-faire.

They organized town meetings that drew hundreds of participants. They built bridges with principals, police and parents.

But now that the Committee for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Teenagers is established, can the group use its leverage to keep more minors from drinking or doing drugs?

After the committee held the last of three mediated forums Tuesday at Chapel Hill Town Hall, members recommended that schools and police become much more punitive. Among other pro-

posals, they said students caught using substances should lose their club, sports or parking privileges and that police should cite every underage drinker.

"How it's going now, it's not working," said Dale Pratt-Wilson, the committee's founder. "We've got to try something else."

They asked police to abandon a common practice — turning offending teenagers over to their parents in lieu of charging them — and conduct more stings on alcohol vendors. They also want officers to admonish motorists who allow teenagers to drink in the car.

"Really, the theme is simple. It's just to enforce the law," said Isabel Gaffner, a committee leader. "There's a pre-prom party where a lot of being

See **PANEL**, Page A4

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Panel

continued from page A1

served, that's illegal." Chapel Hill Police Chief Gregg Jarvies said the group has influenced some changes at the department. Officers are keeping better records on where parties are held and who's attending. The department's policy on underage drinking has been re-emphasized to supervisors and, most importantly, police are conducting more stings on businesses.

Police used to do about four stings a year to catch businesses selling to underage buyers. Now they'll conduct at least 12 per year, Jarvies said.

But the bigger issue involves "community norms," he said. Because his department "polices the way the community directs us to police," Jarvies said, he'd likely need the Town Council to endorse the committee's most severe proposal, a zero-tolerance approach to underage drinking.

"If we did that, we'd have to go into every fraternity house, every apartment where at least two-thirds of the crowd is underage and arrest everyone," he said.

Just as every driver who squeaks slowly past a stop sign isn't criminally charged, officers should use discretion with underage drinkers, Jarvies said. At Tuesday's forum, he did note that hundreds of minors are cited for drinking every year in Chapel Hill.

"We'll continue to work with the committee," Jarvies said. "But we won't be making any immediate drastic changes."

The committee also has petitioned the Town Council to push for tougher action on teen substance abuse. At council member Jim Ward's suggestion Wednesday, the council decided to discuss it further at a forthcoming meeting.

"It's an opportunity to recalibrate what the community wants," he said. "We may arrive at a place that's right where we are now or we may come to some different conclusions."

The committee has focused much of its effort on affecting Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. At Tuesday's meeting, members said high school officials should make campus drug searches more common, and

that teachers should be better trained to spot kids under the influence.

Most of the committee proposals overlap with initiatives the district is already carrying out or is considering, said health director Stephanie Willis. Since March, drug-sniffing dogs have been sent out more frequently than before; they're now in high schools at least once a month. A draft substance-abuse policy, created months before the committee formed, proposes that student membership in all extracurricular groups — not just athletics — should be revoked for alcohol and drug violations.

Presently, the district is gathering input before turning a proposal over to the school board. It's part of an effort to synch up a substance-abuse policy across the district rather than leaving it up to each school, she said.

Willis conceded that the district is "not doing enough." The committee's efforts, she said, have helped bolstered her own.

"I applaud what they're doing," Willis said. "Almost all the things they've suggested we're already working on."

According to a survey of Chapel Hill-Carrboro high school students in the spring, 52 percent of students surveyed reported drinking alcohol in the previous month. About 44 percent said they'd been offered or sold drugs in the previous year.

Pratt-Wilson's activism has not been universally embraced. Since the committee became known, her cars have been egged, her yard has been trashed and she's been left a vulgar note. Though all three meetings were well-attended, they attracted few teenagers.

Now the committee and its seven core members are at a turning point. They consider their initial mission, to get Chapel Hill talking about teenage substance abuse, a success. During "phase two," they could become a watchdog group, a clearinghouse for parent complaints or a group that simply continues challenging norms.

That will be determined at a Nov. 18 public meeting at 7 p.m., again at Chapel Hill Town Hall.

"We have very much focused this first stage on building bridges, not burning them," Pratt-Wilson said. "We think everyone can do better."

Carrboro

continued from page A1

Carrboro-Chapel Hill the future home of the shelter.

But the aldermen objected to the scheduling of the session, which is set for 8 until noon on a Thursday. Scheduling the event weekday morning, the members agreed, would limit participation by including most of the men themselves, whose schedules make it difficult to attend.

"You don't schedule a community roundtable at when most of the community can't come," said Al Jacquie Gast. "Not even I can just take time off work when they want. This is an issue, and people need to be able to participate. I scheduled it at this time because you're not going to get the level of participation that is needed. A forum needs to be held at a public time."

James Harris, Carrboro community and economic development director, on the committee that organized the roundtable discussion and urged the board to participate.

"We need a voice in this conversation," Harris told the board.

Security

continued from page A1

a family that worries about putting food on the table at the end of the month.

This is a shocking statistic for a country as wealthy as ours is. And a recent report reveals that over a million more Americans have fallen into the poverty category.

Yet Congress consistently refuses to raise the minimum wage of only \$5.15 an hour. Can you imagine making a living on this? Consequently, now see the poor trying to hold on to their jobs, and down multiple jobs, and process they are often unable to give time to their children who frequently are denied adequate childcare. The rich are getting richer, the middle

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The Chapel Hill News

Parent group says town soft on teen abuse

It seeks support from schools and police in holding three community forums.

By Patrick Winn
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — A group bent on drying up teen drinking and drug use is finding allies with school administrators and police.

A small grassroots team of mostly parents, the Committee for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Teenagers, wants to reform what members call a lax attitude toward substance abuse in Chapel Hill. This casual approach of parents, police and teachers comes at middle and high school students' expense, according to Dale Pratt-Wilson, a mother of two who started the small group.

"When I say they're buying and selling at school, they are," she said. "When I say they're drinking alcohol in class from water bottles, they are."

Smoking pot at noon? They are. After Pratt-Wilson introduced her agenda, which includes holding three community forums to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools board Thursday officials informally pledged their support.

"We should join hands with this group," said board Chairwoman Elizabeth Carter. Superintendent Neil Pedersen added: "I don't think our position has ever been unclear about having zero tolerance for drug use, possession or sale on campus. ... I hope there's no confusion about that. But we need to take some bold steps."

The group already has a schools liaison, district health director Stephanie Willis. A survey of 234 students she helped conduct in the spring in eighth- and 10th-grade health classes props up some of Pratt-Wilson's assertions, Willis said.

■ 44 percent of high school students and 16 percent of middle school students reported someone offering, selling or giving them drugs during the previous 12 months.
■ 26.1 percent of high school students reported using marijuana in the previous 30 days.
■ 52 percent of high school students reported drinking alcohol during the previous 30 days.
Willis noted that all survey respondents were students in a health class.

See GROUP, Page A7

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Group

Continued from page A1

who had parental permission to reply. The percentages would likely be higher, she said, if the schools hadn't asked for a parent's consent.

"It's been a problem for years," Willis said. "With many of the kids drinking socially in this community, their parents get defensive. They think, 'That's not my child!'"

Pratt-Wilson's activism was sparked by a May keg party at an East Chapel Hill High School junior's Franklin Street apartment. After hearing a few loose details about the gathering, she called around, discovered its location and showed up.

More than 100 minors were there, she said, many drinking beer from plastic cups. The air "reeked of the odor of marijuana," she said, and when an offi-

cer arrived to bust up the party, kids "scattered in every direction," tossing cups and driving away in cars.

She circulated this account in a widely distributed e-mail that doubled as her rallying cry.

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On average, police intercept one or two underage drinking incidents each weekend, said Matt Sullivan, crisis counselor with the Chapel Hill Police. On the last weekend of July, for example, he said police arrested a couple of kids for underage possession of liquor near Scroggs Elementary and — in a separate incident — broke up a house party involving about eight teenagers.

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students," Sullivan said. "They tend to run consistently throughout the summer and the school year."

A local phenomenon exaggerating the problem is the unusual number of teenagers living unattended in apartments, Sullivan said. Some are put there by fed-up parents, he said, but many are set up by out-of-trick parents who want their kids to attend Chapel Hill's acclaimed high schools.

"I wouldn't say it's an epidemic problem," he said. "But we get about four or five addresses every year."

On the scene, Chapel Hill officers are required to write down the names and phone numbers of "as many of the participants as possible," according to a police department memo. Later, counselors such as Sullivan make calls to the minors' parents, a practice that began about five years ago.

"The typical law enforcement response has been to break up the party and move them on," Sullivan said. "That did nothing to help parents know what their kids are involved in."

When called, many parents are grateful but others are combative, he said.

"They expect us to provide some burden of proof, even when the officer smelled it on the kids' breath," Sullivan said. "They'll say, 'Prove it.'"

Pratt-Wilson's group can make its most headway with these parents and those who feel guilty for being authoritative, he said.

"Consistently, I hear Chapel Hill parents feeling like they have to let Johnny or Sally do X because the other parents are," Sullivan said.

"But when two or three parents start to talk, they realize the kid has done a great job of isolating them," he said. "When

you get them together, they start to feel empowered. Now they know they're not the only one who wants to set curfews and doesn't want their kid going to spring break."

Since the May keg party, Pratt-Wilson has been steadily encouraging school officials, police and parents to sharpen punishments for underage drinking.

The police, she said, should show up in greater numbers to underage parties and charge more teenagers in addition to following up with parents. If teachers or school administrators know of students who are drinking or doing drugs, they should feel obligated to report it, she said, just as they would instances of child abuse.

But Pratt-Wilson said parents who take a hands-off approach to their teenagers "really have to be brought to their knees." "The schools are not without

blame, and the police could do better," she said. "But parents could definitely do better. We're all doing it, it's not a big deal. If it's one vigilante mom doing it, it's much harder."

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The Chapel Hill News

Our Hometown Newspaper
Wednesday, August 11, 2004

Vol. 81, No. 39

Parent group says town soft on teen abuse

It seeks support from schools and police in holding three community forums.

By PATRICK WINN
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — A group bent on drying up teen drinking and drugging is finding allies with school administrators and police.

A small grassroots team of mostly

parents, the Committee for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Teenagers, wants to reform what members call a lax attitude toward substance abuse in Chapel Hill. This casual approach of parents, police and teachers comes at middle and high school students' expense, according to Dale Pratt-Wilson, a mother of two who started the small group.

"When I say they're buying and selling at school, they are," she said.

"When I say they're drinking alcohol in class from water bottles, they are,

Smoking pot at noon? They are."

After Pratt-Wilson introduced her agenda, which includes holding three community forums, to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools board Thursday, officials informally pledged their support.

"We should join hands with this group," said board Chairwoman Elizabeth Carter.

Superintendent Neil Pedersen added: "I don't think our position has ever been unclear about having zero

tolerance, for drug use, possession or sale on campus. ... I hope there's no confusion about that. But we need to take some bold steps."

The group already has a schools liaison, district health director Stephanie Willis. A survey of 234 students she helped conduct in the spring in eighth- and 10th-grade health classes props up some of Pratt-Wilson's assertions, Willis said.

■ 44 percent of high school students and 16 percent of middle school stu-

dents reported someone offering, selling or giving them drugs during the previous 12 months.

■ 26.1 percent of high school students reported using marijuana in the previous 30 days.

■ 52 percent of high school students reported drinking alcohol during the previous 30 days.

Willis noted that all survey respondents were students in a health class.

See GROUP, Page A7

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Group

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who had parental permission to reply. The percentages would likely be higher, she said, if the schools hadn't asked for a parent's consent.

"It's been a problem for years," Willis said. "With many of the kids drinking socially in this community, their parents get defensive. They think, 'That's not my child.'"

Pratt-Wilson's activism was sparked by a May keg party at an East Chapel Hill High School junior's Franklin Street apartment. After hearing a few loose details about the gathering, she called around, discovered its location and showed up.

More than 100 minors were there, she said, many drinking beer from plastic cups. The air "reeked of the odor of marijuana," she said, and when an offi-

cer arrived to bust up the party, kids "scattered in every direction, tossing cups and driving away in cars."

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The Chapel Hill News

Your Hometown Newspaper

Wednesday, September 29, 2004

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Parents grill police, principals about teen drinking

The second of three forums on teenage drinking and drug use, police said they don't seek offenders.

ATRICK WINN
Writer

CHAPEL HILL — Teenage drinking and drug abuse in Chapel Hill is often dismissed by parents and school principals as a high school problem, local police chiefs said at a day forum.

Held by the Committee for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Teenagers — which formed in May to generate awareness of what its founder called a "societal menace" of substance-abusing high school students — the forum put a panel of police and school officials before about 150 parents.

The second of three meetings, it was held at the Carrboro Century Center, and included Chapel Hill Police Chief Gregg Jarvis, Carrboro Police Chief Carolyn Hutchison, Chapel Hill High School Principal Mary Ann Hardebeck and East Chapel Hill High Principal Dave Thaden.

Most officials said parents, when confronted about their child's drinking or drug abuse, often aggressively deny any wrongdoing.

"We are met most frequently with parental denial," Hutchison said. When picking their kid up from the police station, "they have an epiphany. And it's a difficult epiphany," she said.

And complaints about parties — hardly uncommon in Chapel Hill — rarely come from people "concerned because there's a lot of youngsters drinking beer," Jarvis said. The caller is much more likely to be upset because of the loud noise or street traffic.

In short, most locals have been relatively unfazed by underage drinking in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, the chiefs said. For better or for worse, Jarvis said, police practices reflect that attitude.

"The community sets the norms by which we police," he said. "We do not cite every speeder, nor do we go into every fraternity party and cite everyone who's under 21. Do we know it's going on? Yes."

If the public convinced local mayors and their boards that those norms have changed, police practices would likely change, he said. But Jarvis also noted

that he's happy with his officers' cretion: They generally go easy on first-time speeders, for example, don't chase high school students over town in search of drinking violations.

"That's not the way we police," said.

Large parties driven by high school students are less common in Carrboro, Hutchison said. Since the beginning of June, none have been reported, she said.

Some parents' questions were pointed and specific. If there's a problem, see TEENS, Page A4

Health

... for lunch

Comarian

Teens

continued from page A1

behind East where kids gather to get high during lunch, why isn't that spot broken up?

Thaden said security cameras and golf cart patrols help prevent on-campus substance abuse, and that school-based officers frequent popular "gathering places." Starting next school year, juniors won't be allowed to leave during lunch, he said.

"But kids are fairly resourceful," Thaden said. "There's a lot of them, and they're clever."

Thaden and Hardebeck cited a number of student-centered efforts to reduce substance abuse, breathalyzers at school functions and mock car crashes among them.

But their mission is hampered by the lure of college life and a town spirit that "puts a premium on growing up... (joining) the energy across the street," Thaden said.

Another mother asked

whether police could change the Chapel Hill vibe, which reminds her of the free-spirited 1960s. Laying blame on clubs that host touring bands, she asked whether they could be shut down.

"We can't shut them down," Jarvies said. "There's no law being violated."

Toward the end of the two-and-a-half-hour forum, Jarvies said that the evening's focus — high school students — were the stakeholders "we hear from less than anybody." Though the crowd contained other young faces, only two students spoke Monday.

"We think that (this) is moving towards a good ideal," said Jackie Colvin, a 17-year-old senior at East. "But we're going to respond to authorities that will come down to our level, not ones that treat us like we're hoodlums."

The committee will wrap up its trio of forums on Oct. 26. That meeting, to be held in Chapel Hill, will focus on solutions.

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Turning

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THE CHAPEL HILL HERALD

OPINION & OUTLOOK

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2

EDITORIAL

Violence numbers can't be dismissed

Here's some good news that could be gleaned from the state's release this past week of statistics about school violence: None of three local school districts reported a rape, a kidnapping or a death by other than natural causes in 2003-04.

That may be where the good news ends. In all three districts — Chapel Hill-Carrboro, Orange County and Chatham County — there were more violent incidents reported than in the year before. In all three school systems, the rate of violence — how many incidents per 1,000 students — also went up.

Local schools officials were quite careful about trying to put the statistics in context. They noted, first of all, that the local numbers reflect both regional and statewide trends. There was more violence in schools throughout North Carolina, and compared to some areas, the situation wasn't so awful here. And, the school leaders pointed out, accurately, the increase in numbers might be

More than half of the incidents in the city schools last year, for example, were drug or alcohol related. The statistics were similar in Orange and Chatham.

attributable to other factors. As city schools Superintendent Neil Pedersen noted, the increases could just as easily be a result of better reporting, teachers and administrators becoming more vigilant.

Chatham County Superintendent Larry Mabe claimed as well that the numbers looked worse than they are, saying they also could reflect innocent instances where a student, say, accidentally brought a knife to school, with no intent of ever using it.

This is all known as spinning, and it doesn't change the fact that school administrators

should be concerned about the rise in incidents. They should be particularly concerned about the preponderance of two factors in the rise. Those are the number of incidents of possession of a controlled substance and possession of alcoholic beverages.

We have been hearing for several months now about the growing scourge of drug and alcohol use among our teens, thanks to Dale Pratt-Wilson and her Committee for Alcohol and Drug-Free Teenagers and the Chapel Hill High School Drug and Alcohol Awareness Task Force. If you didn't believe them before, well, here's the proof.

More than half of the incidents in the city schools last year, for example, were drug or alcohol related. The numbers were similar in the other districts.

Alarm bells should be going off throughout the community — not just in the schools. It's time we started realizing the extent of the problem in our midst.

J.P. TROSTLE'S VIEW

THE NEW BLUE & RED

There's a Lord Protector out there somewhere

Somewhere in the new Congress, hidden from view for the moment is our very own Lord Protector (Oliver Cromwell) who will lead us to the Promised Land?

Oh! He was a Puritan. Isn't this the same group who came to America seeking freedom and by refusing to accept the presence of anyone who

DELUSIONAL!

MORON!

J.P. Trostle

A WEEK'S WORTH OF NEWS

Sunday:

- One-stop voting, finished, sets records and across the state.
- Homeowners in n western Chatham Co district are working to sure voters approve n water lines for the ar
- University plane tinkering with UNC's plan to give it a bit r detail and to improve pedestrian traffic in t northeast quadrant c pus.

Monday:

- Chapel Hill's annual loween bash on Fran Street attracted mor 70,000, including the pirates, cavemen and pipes. But police say thing went pretty sn
- UNC's planning program that will all dents to download audio and video fro Internet — includin — legally, and for fr

Tuesday:

- At an informati sion on the plannec action by Carrboro c neighborhoods nor Homestead Road, r idents say they dor to be taken over by town.
- Local polling p long lines as Orang Chatham voters cc in large numbers o tion Day.

Time for action on teen drinking

If you wonder how much concern there is in Chapel Hill-Carrboro about teen substance abuse, a community forum on the topic at Town Hall Monday night was instructive.

The 152-seat council chamber was nearly full for the first of three planned community forums on teenage drinking and drug use. Among the audience were two state legislators, two judges, school board members and administrators from all the middle and high schools in the system.

The turnout demonstrated that the parent organizers of the forum have succeeded in getting the community's attention to this long-standing but little-discussed problem. As speaker after speaker noted Monday night, we tend to dismiss the drinking and drug issue as an ordinary rite of passage in a college environment where underage drinking is tolerated, if not encouraged. Police, schools and other officials acknowledge that they operate according to a community norm of behavior that, to this point, has not called for aggressive enforcement or substantive consequences.

The presentations Monday night included some eyebrow-raising statistics and anecdotes. Surveys by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control show that 52 percent of Chapel Hill high school students reported drinking alcohol in the last 30 days, compared to 45 percent nationally. Forty-four percent of local students reported encountering drugs on school property, compared to 28 percent nationally.

Some students at the forum who are now in rehabilitation said the statistics probably understate the reality of teen drug and alcohol use. Also disturbing were accounts by several parents who were brave enough to bare in public their struggles with their children over substances. One mother said her drug-deranged son tried three times to kill her.

Several issues arise here. One is the whole community norm question. Currently, police have a fairly passive policy of citing kids caught with alcohol and notifying their parents, but not trying hard to make arrests. Do parents want a crackdown, if it means their children will go through the court system? And can the courts handle it?

The school system has a stiff policy — five-day suspension for the first arrest, semester suspension thereafter. But the low number of suspensions doesn't match up with the reported school substance abuse numbers. Are schools policing the halls hard enough? Do we pressure teachers to turn in more kids?

Even if police and schools did crack down, what would happen to kids thereafter? Anecdotal accounts Monday night indicated substance abuse recovery programs used by the courts are not effective, and there are inadequate treatment and rehab facilities for teens in the community.

Three more community forums are scheduled over the next several months by the parent volunteer group, aimed at education and consciousness-raising. But if there is to be any effect from all this, the initiative needs to move from discussion to action. Soon, while the interest is still high, someone needs to convene an action group of parents, school officials, police and court officials, health professionals — and teens — to design and implement changes that can have an impact.

Who's the someone? That's not clear, but more leadership from elected officials would be helpful. Only one from the two town boards, Chapel Hill Council Member Jim Ward, was present at Monday's forum, and parent leaders say they have had trouble getting the attention of the mayors. They need to step forward.

As the community addresses the problem, we have to be careful about overreacting. Teenage substance abuse is a topic sure to garner parent interest, but we should guard against unwarranted assumptions that all youngsters are abusers and against installing Gestapo measures in schools that might compromise the educational process.

But we also need to recognize that there is a problem. Forum organizer Dale Pratt-Wilson and her corps of parent volunteers are to be commended for engaging the community's interest on this important topic. No change will happen unless parents taken the lead, and this group has demonstrated the power of parents committed to an important cause.

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Schools shy away from dance

The annual Thanksgiving Dance, which has developed a reputation for student drinking, will include breathalyzers this year.

By PATRICK WINN
Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL — As massive as most proms, a long-standing high school Thanksgiving Dance has a catch.

Chapel Hill's two high schools want nothing to do with it.

More than 30 years running, the dance will draw about 600 high school students to the Millennium Hotel in Durham on Friday night. All of the \$50 tickets are sold off-campus by a tightly knit sorority of high school girls and their moms.

And though it's a prom-caliber event, including formal wear, school administrators struggle to distance themselves from tales of teen drinking that circulate the Monday afterwards.

"We try and stress that it has nothing to do with the schools,"

See DANCE, Page A4

Dance

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said Principal Dave Thaden of East Chapel Hill High School. "We don't want our name associated with it."

For the first time this year, students will blow into breathalyzers as they enter the dance. Prompted by an anti-teen-drinking group, organizers agreed to post about 10 school-owned machines at the door. Breathalyzers are used at most every major school-sponsored event.

But a chief organizer of the mother-daughter group said any pressure to change the dance should probably come

from inside.

"What we would have liked is a chance for students to do it ourselves, to prove we're capable of managing this," said senior Jackie Colvin, an East student. "The girls this year had already decided to sort of start disassociating ourselves with the negative things people have thought."

Organizers argue that it's unfair to let a handful of kids color the entire night.

"I think anytime you have 600 kids in a large gathering, there will be a few kids who don't go by the rules," said Pat Zook, mother of a Chapel Hill High student and lead organizer. "I never thought of it as having a

bad reputation. I think it's a pretty healthy thing when kids want to organize something. If there's any kid that's in trouble, you try to facilitate it."

About 30 parents chaperone the dance, Zook said. School-based police officers are hired off-duty in case of trouble, as are four hotel security guards.

When it's all over, several thousand dollars will go to the Chapel Hill Women's Center and an AIDS charity for African women. The goal this year is \$4,000, Colvin said.

But some believe the bad outweighs the good, as more than just a few students arrive drunk.

"They not only drink in tremendous amounts, some kids can't even get out of the car and into the dance," said Linda Hammock, who recently resigned as Chapel Hill High's student assistance specialist.

Because it has the "same sense of standing" as most proms, the dance is too often believed by parents to be school-sponsored, said Ruby Bugg, a guidance counselor at East.

"We know the misconception is out there," said Bugg, who has fielded a number of calls from moms and dads ready to blame the school after a Thanksgiving dance incident. "They thought, 'It can't be but so bad if the school is doing it.'"

Chapel Hill High's most recent e-mail newsletter warned parents that the dance is not school-sponsored and cited its "infamous reputation for drinking, drugging and other risky behaviors."

The blurb was written by The Committee for Alcohol- and Drug-Free Teenagers' founder, Dale Pratt-Wilson, who has held three well-attended town meetings since the group's May inception. The committee pressured dance organizers to use school breathalyzers earlier this month.

"Kids are getting drunk, and schools are getting dumped on for it," Pratt-Wilson said. "This is not something parents have wanted to be accountable for. It's not really anybody's organization. It just turns over every year."

After each dance, organizers pass the torch to a younger sister or a close friend. Since you have to be at least a sophomore to buy a ticket, freshmen can't join.

Guys also are barred from buying tickets. In the "Sadie Hawkins" style, girls are responsible for finding dates. The tickets are sold first-come, first-serve by a team of about 25 girls who organize the dance.

The torch-passing system was started early on, Zook said, by families who wanted to make sure the dance didn't die out. Since it's not a school function, that "helped assure it would continue."

Other rumblings surrounds the dance, including a belief that it started during the period when schools were being integrated, so white students could hold a formal dance without including blacks

"That's really something we're completely disconnected from," Colvin said. "When I joined the dance, I'd never heard anything about the origin of the dance. I knew it strictly as a charitable organization."

Despite the rumors and the troublemakers, dance organizers say it is fall's answer to the prom: a safe, formal night out for hundreds of Chapel Hill teenagers.

"It's unfortunate," Colvin said. "Only a small handful of students get in trouble while hundreds have a great time. The majority arrives and leaves in perfect condition."

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