

Wednesday, April 7, 2010

NECC Coalition receives stipend for town hall meeting

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition is conducting a town hall meeting, slated for April 13, to alert the entire community including: health professionals, justice/law enforcement officials, local government officials, representatives of faith-based organizations and local businesses, and parents about our youths' leading public health issue, underage drinking.

Research indicates that families exert a great deal of influence on whether a child uses alcohol later in life. However, all sectors of the community play a role in the outcomes for youth.

The Town Hall Meeting is from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday, April 13, at the Blue Ash Municipal Building, 4343 Cooper Road, Blue Ash.

A panel of experts will raise awareness of the risks of underage drinking and encourage dialogue with the community regarding solutions. The Town Hall Meetings are part of a nationwide effort to meet goals from The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking.

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition is one of more than 2,000 community coalitions nationwide to receive a stipend from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Services Administration.

The NECC Coalition will follow up after the Town Hall Meeting with other short- and long-term activities and programs that provide a continued emphasis on preventing underage drinking in the community.

The NECC Coalition works to promote healthy communities and healthy youth through representation from all community sectors: Schools, health organizations, service organizations, businesses, youth, law enforcement, government, faith organizations, parent organizations, senior citizens, social services and media.

Teen drinking to be town hall focus

By Eric Bradley
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Coalition says Ohio underage consumption prolific

BLUE ASH – Alcohol use among teens is the No. 1 public health risk facing youth today, according to Nancy Rolfert, co-chair of an upcoming town hall meeting to educate the public on the subject. *

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition is hosting the meeting, to be held at 7 p.m. April 13 at the Blue Ash Municipal Building, 4343 Cooper Road. * - -

Alcohol consumption by underage drinkers in Ohio is prolific, according to a study cited by the coalition. It said minors consumed 22.6 percent of the alcohol sold in Ohio in 2007, totaling \$1.1 billion in sales. Underage drinking cost Ohioans \$3.2 billion in 2007, the study said.

When the problem is so big, what can be done?

“You need harsher penal-

ties,” Rolfert said, for the adults who provide alcohol to young people or allow the youths to consume it.

Awareness is also important. “Parents have to be more aware of what their kids do,” said Rolfert, “aware of where their kids go, whose house they’re going to. Are there going to be parents at the house?”

“You have to know what

your kids are doing.”

The coalition has been awarded a stipend by the U.S. Department of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to conduct the town meeting, held during Alcohol Awareness Month.

The April 13 meeting is intended to inform parents, community leaders, businesses, faith-based organizations

and others about changing attitudes and alcohol use by underage drinkers.

There is no charge for attendance. Registration begins at 6:45 p.m.

Friday’s death of St. Xavier football star Matt James has shined a spotlight locally on the issue of underage drinking. Police said James was drinking at the time of his death.

The incident brings attention to an already huge problem, Rolfert said. “It happens to a lot of youth... It’s not publicized so much because either the schools or the family doesn’t want it to get out in the news.”

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition was founded in 1983 and covers Blue Ash, Montgomery, Sycamore Township and Symmes Township. More information: call 513-489-2587 or e-mail necc@cinci.rr.com.

Alcohol abuse among teenagers topic of meeting

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Community Press/Jeanne Houck

Sycamore High School senior Jamie Alemagno stays after class to talk about government spending with Jon Johnson, local government adviser with the International City/County Management Association.

@cinci.rr.com.

— **Jeanne Houck,**
Community Press

BLUE ASH TAKES BUDGET PLANNING ON THE ROAD: Students informally surveyed at Sycamore High School said that Blue Ash needs more places to "chill."

Adults at a Blue Ash City Council work session earlier this year said they were interested in more "diverse leisure-time activities."

The words are different, but the meaning is the same, say representatives of the International City/County Management Association — consultants Blue Ash is paying some \$28,000 to gather public opinion as the city prioritizes services in its budget.

"There was a great deal of similarities between the students' comments and those of the adults — expressed in a different way, but very much the same," said Jon Johnson, local government advisor with the management association, after meeting March 25 with eight U.S. government classes taught by Kevin Wittman at Sycamore High.

"Like adults, they want to feel safe in their community, have opportunities for more things to do, live in a clean,

healthy and attractive environment and make sure the economy is strong with good job opportunities.

"They are especially interested in more public transportation, a better network of sidewalks so they can get around town without driving and having the police become less of an enforcement presence and more of a connected community partner in making this a safe place to live," Johnson said.

Wittman said he was pleased to host the seminars at the high school, where students confidentially ranked the municipal services most important to them and the consultants led a discussion of the results.

"Students like the idea that adults care about what they think," Wittman said.

Senior Chelsie King of Blue Ash said the most important thing she learned is that "we have more programs that tax money goes to than I thought."

Josh Katz, another Blue Ash senior, said the most important thing he learned was that "the city wants to hear our opinion of what is going on."

The city remains all ears.

— **Jeanne Houck,**
Community Press

Coalition to host meeting on underage drinking

By Jeanne Houck

jhouck@communitypress.com

A local survey shows that as alcohol usage increases among school-age children, their perception that it is harmful decreases.

It's a finding at the heart of a town hall meeting titled "Underage Drinking: A Community Problem" to be hosted Tuesday, April 13, by the Northeast Community Challenge Coalition.

The public is invited to attend the event scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. at the Blue Ash Municipal & Safety Center, 4343 Cooper Road.

Nancy Rolfert, co-chairman of the event, said alcohol use among teens is the No. 1 public health risk facing youth today.

Yet, "Alcohol rarely gets the same attention as other drugs," said Debbie Miller, vice president of the coalition. "However, education through strategies provided by the NECC Coalition and the town hall meeting will increase awareness of the

dangers of underage alcohol use."

The survey cited by the coalition, its latest survey with results available, was conducted in 2008 at Sycamore High School, Ursuline Academy, Moeller High School and Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy.

It showed that 4 percent of seventh-graders, 12 percent of freshmen and 34 percent of seniors used alcohol monthly.

It also showed that 82 percent of seventh-graders, 73 percent of freshmen and 56 percent of seniors said using alcohol is harmful.

At the town hall meeting, Kathy Lehr of Channel 48's CET Focus will moderate a panel discussion on the trends and impact of underage drinking.

Panel participants will include Sarah Oerther of the Cincinnati Drug and Poison Information Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Dee Mason of Working Partners in Columbus, which educates people in the work-

place about underage drinking, and Rob White, a detective with the Cincinnati division of the FBI's Regional Computer Forensics Laboratory.

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition scheduled the town hall meeting in response to the U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking and it will kick off the coalition's related local annual campaign.

The local group is one of hundreds of coalitions nationwide awarded a stipend by the U.S. Substance Abuse & Mental

Health Services Administration to conduct such an event.

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition was founded in 1983 and is the longest-standing community prevention coalition in Ohio.

It is focused on the communities of Blue Ash, where it is headquartered, Montgomery, Sycamore Township and Symmes Township.

For more information, visit necc@cinci.rr.com or call 489-2587.



Lehr

OPINIONS

■ **BRUCE BESSO**

Youth drinking is hurting us all

Underage drinking cost Ohioans \$3.2 billion in 2007, or \$2,866 for each youth in the State of Ohio, according to Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation.

This places Ohio as ninth highest among the 50 states for the cost per youth of underage drinking.

Recent studies have found that more teenagers are using alcohol.

The scope of the underage drinking problem is enormous: 10.1 million underage youth (aged 12-20) are current alcohol drinkers.

Tragic health, social and economic problems result from youth alcohol use.

Underage drinking is a causal factor in a host of serious problems, including mental health problems, homicide, suicide, traumatic injury, traffic crashes, violence, alcohol poisoning and alcohol abuse and dependence.

The problem is complex and will take all community sectors (educators, parents, youth, businesses, faith organizations, civic organizations, senior organizations, law enforcement, government, social service agencies, health professionals and the media) to work collaboratively.

We must send clear consistent messages about the health, legal, social and safety consequences about underage drinking and related risk behaviors.

During April, Alcohol Awareness Month, more than 1,700 organizations nationwide will be conducting Town Hall Meetings to promote the U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking.

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition will sponsor a Town Hall Meeting on April 13 from 7-9 p.m. at the Blue Ash Municipal Building.

The meeting will educate businesses, parents, faith organizations, educators, health professionals, civic organizations, the media, law enforcement, community leaders and other community sectors about this important issue. The goal is to mobilize all community sectors to take action.

The meeting also serves to launch the Coalition's annual public awareness campaign to prevent and reduce underage drinking, a collective responsibility of all community sectors.

The NECC Coalition, which encompasses the municipalities of Blue Ash, Montgomery, Symmes Township and Sycamore Township has been working to foster the development of Healthy Communities and Healthy Youth since 1983.



Bruce Besso is the acting president of the Northeast Community Challenge Coalition.

OPINIONS

■ SARAH OERTHER

No kind of alcohol is safe

Alcohol use among adolescents affects all socioeconomic groups, and represents a tremendous financial and social cost. It can affect every organ system in the body. In adolescents, early onset of drinking and alcohol misuse over several years is associated

with changes in the brain such as the hippocampus, the area associated with long-term memory and spatial awareness. It is a known fact that the younger a person is when they start drinking, the greater the chance they have of becoming addicted to alcohol at some point in their lives. Also, more than four in 10 people who begin drinking before age 15 eventually become alcoholics.

The brain undergoes significant changes during adolescence. Chronic exposure to alcohol during early adolescence has been shown to alter puberty-associated hormone levels and the timing an adolescent undergoes puberty. Animal studies suggest alcohol can affect changes in hormone levels, sexuality and behavior differently during adolescence.

Some people drink alcohol in

ways that are detrimental to themselves or others. In cases of mild intoxication, the signs of inebriation are quite variable: A person might lose self-control or become ill-tempered; and as they become more intoxicated, their inhibitions become more impaired. A person

can become irritable, aggressive, violent, confused or tired. With severe intoxication, there is loss of airway protective reflexes, central nervous system depression, a person can go into coma, and there is an increased risk of death because a person can stop breathing.

It is important for all teenagers to know that there is no safe kind of alcohol. One 12-ounce bottle of beer or a 5-ounce glass of wine (about a half-cup) has as much alcohol as a 1.5-ounce shot of liquor. Alcohol can cause prob-

lems no matter how it is consumed. The bottom line is if an adolescent has a problem with alcohol, they should be urged to get help. Treatment works. The earlier a person receives treatment, the better. The longer problems with alcohol are ignored, the higher the chances of permanent physical and psychological effects.



Sarah E. Oerther, MSN, Med, RN, CSPI, is an information specialist in the Drug and Poison Information Center at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

Community

Town Hall meeting addresses underage drinking

The Northeast Community Challenge Coalition Town Hall Meeting alerted the community to the social, legal and health risks of underage drinking.

Underage drinking cost Ohioans \$3.2 billion in 2007, or \$2,866 per year for each youth in the state, according to Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation. This places Ohio as ninth highest among the 50 states for the cost per youth of underage drinking. In 2007, underage drinkers consumed 22.6 percent of all alcohol sold in Ohio, totaling \$1.1 billion in sales.

Expert panelists from Working Partners, Cincinnati Children's Drug and Poison Control Information Center, FBI's Regional Computer Forensics Lab, and the Lindner Center of Hope

addressed the trends, risks, impact of underage drinking. The event was facilitated by Kathy Lehr, moderator on CET Focus, Channel 48.

Leading the community call to action to prevent and reduce underage drinking were members of the NECC Youth Coalition, representing students from Moeller High School, Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy, Sycamore High School and Ursuline Academy.

"Underage drinking happens everywhere. It is important to educate everyone in the community," said Alex Abbate, NECC Youth Coalition presenter and Ursuline Academy senior.

Barb Russell, NECC Coalition board member stated, "As a Coalition, representing all community



PROVIDED

Northeast Community Challenge Coalition 2010 Town Hall Meeting Youth Coalition Presenters are, from left: back row, John Lloyd, Brian Markgraf, Meghan Garanich, Corinne Jenkins, Chris Wright, Erin Lloyd and Kelly Maloney; front row, Alex Abbate, Drew Gelwicks, Christine Touvelle, Katie Smith, Amy Fredricks, Missy Gottschlich and Ashley Abbate.

sectors, our vision is to engage the entire community in playing a role in sending a clear, consistent message about our communities norms regarding underage drinking."

The NECC Town Hall meeting was one of nearly 1,800 community-based organizations scheduled to

host close to 2,000 Town Hall meetings throughout the spring and summer months—a significant increase over prior years according to CSAP/SAMHSA (The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Prevention).

The NECC Coalition has worked since 1983 to address this issue by developing and implementing strategies for preventing underage drinking.

The Town Hall Meeting, held during Alcohol Awareness Month, launched the Coalition's annual campaign to prevent and reduce

underage drinking and related risk behaviors.

The NECC Coalition encompasses the communities of Blue Ash, Montgomery, Sycamore Township and Symmes Township. For more information, contact the NECC Coalition at necc@cinci.rr.com or call 489-2587.