

“Every 15 Minutes Program” at Germantown High School

April 21 & 22, 2016

Written and submitted by Joel R. Farren, Principal, Germantown High School

On Thursday, April 21 and Friday, April 22, Germantown High School participated in presenting the “Every 15 Minutes” program. This program is an international program, presented across the country by hundreds of high schools, and is based on national statistics that had shown that every fifteen minutes someone in the United States is killed due to an alcohol-related vehicle crash. The statistic has improved from every fifteen minutes to approximately every fifty-three minutes as a result of many nationwide programs, including the “Every 15 Minutes” program. In 2005, this program was proposed to the Washington County Injury Prevention Coalition and West Bend High Schools, where it was then held in 2006 for the first time in Southeast Wisconsin. Germantown High School held the event in 2007, Hartford High School in 2008, and the West Bend High Schools in 2009. The event was held at Kewaskum High School and Germantown High School in 2010, West Bend High Schools in 2011, and Slinger High School in 2012. We produced the program again in 2013, then served as the direct mentors to Greendale High School for their production in 2014.

This program’s purpose is to dramatically imprint on teenagers the potentially dangerous consequences of drinking alcohol or being in a vehicle after someone has been drinking alcohol. Aimed at preventing alcohol-related traffic injuries and fatalities, the educational program also challenges students to think about drinking, personal safety, and the responsibility of making mature decisions. Our versions have also included the dangers of drugs, the dangers of text messaging while driving, and that some decisions within or outside of our control can have long-lasting impacts on so many. With each guest speaker has come a personalized message as well, ranging from our guest speaker in 2007 and 2010 who had been legally drunk while driving and killed someone, to a Green Bay Police Officer who lost his daughter to a drunk driver (2013) to our last guest speaker who lost his All-American college football player son to a drinking and driving accident.

Planning for the 2016 production began in the summer of 2015 with Mr. Joel R. Farren, Germantown High School Principal; Officers Ray Borden and Toni Olson, Germantown Police Department School Resource Officers; Mrs. Susan Bast, School Counselor; and Mrs. Cathie Callahan, School Social Worker. After the initial meetings, Class of 2016 and Student Council President Emma Brandenburg joined the planning team along with Mr. Tom Kujawa, Germantown High School English and Mass Communications Teacher, who assembled a student-led video production crew that consisted of four seniors: Brian Feilbach, Justin Luo, Jacob Mohar, and Alyssa Vo.

With the assistance of the School Counseling Staff, teacher recommendation,s and coach/advisor recommendations, students were selected for the roles of “The Living Dead.” With 1,420 students enrolled and only about 30-35 available spots, this was a challenging process. In addition, the video production crew worked on various “story board” versions which led to the selection of those taking on the actor/actress roles. Multiple meetings with students were held regarding the program and a mandatory meeting with all participants and their parents was held

on the evening of February 3, 2016. All had to opt in or opt out after this meeting and all chose to continue with their participation.

Many additional meetings and consultation sessions were held with a number of community partnerships and donors who made this event possible. All were acknowledged at the end of the student created film and in the assembly bulletin as well. There were twenty-nine students involved in the role of “The Living Dead” and five who took on an actor/actress role. An additional four students worked on the video; one helped create the introductory videos and did some technical work on the film (GHS junior Tim Schabel); three students videotaped the assembly; and two students worked on the artwork for t-shirt design and/or the assembly program (Caitlin Briggs and Alex Schwab).

On Thursday morning at 7:20 AM, Mr. Farren made an announcement regarding the upcoming events, which stated:

In the not so distant past, every 15 minutes someone in the United States died in an alcohol related traffic collision. The statistic has improved, but this tragedy happens far too often, especially in Wisconsin.

In an effort to prevent this type of tragedy, Germantown High School, along with various community agencies, is sponsoring a program entitled “Every 15 Minutes.” This program is our fourth, with previous presentations in 2007, 2010 and 2013.

The program will focus on high school students and will challenge you to think about drinking, personal safety, the responsibility of making mature decisions and the serious consequences for yourself and others as a result of making poor choices.

The “Every 15 Minutes” program begins today and will conclude tomorrow morning with an assembly in our main gym for the entire student body. The chimes you will hear this morning signify the time when a student is taken out of class by the Grim Reaper and then takes on the role of “The Living Dead.”

What you may see and hear today is fictional.

Then, beginning at 7:21 AM and concluding at 10:14 AM, predetermined student participants were pulled out of class by a “Grim Reaper,” (Washington County Deputy Ron Rewerts) at a designated site and time. Germantown Police Chief Peter Hoell then entered the classroom and read the obituary of that student, which had been written and submitted by the parent well in advance of the event and had not been previously shared with the student. The student stayed in the hallway to listen to the obituary. The teacher of that classroom then read a prepared document to that class that stated:

Someone in the United States dies from an alcohol related traffic collision approximately every 53 minutes. The statistic has improved from every 15 minutes to every 53 minutes as a result of nationwide programs such as the “Every 15 Minutes” program.

The student just taken by the grim reaper represents one individual who has died from an alcohol related traffic crash. The obituary was written by their parents in advance and this is the first time the student has heard that information. Germantown High School is participating in a program titled, “Every 15 Minutes.” This program will challenge you to think about the effects of drinking, drinking and driving, personal safety, prescription medication abuse, texting while driving and the responsibility of making mature decisions when lives are involved.

The National Highway Safety Traffic Administration reports that someone dies every 53 minutes due to an alcohol related crash. Today, 27 people in the United States will die due to an alcohol related traffic crash. In 2014, 9,967 individuals died in an alcohol-related traffic collision, which accounts for 31% of all traffic deaths. Our home State of Wisconsin has the highest rate of drunken driving in the United States.

Drinking and driving is the most frequently committed violent crime in the United States and to put things in perspective, since 1989, four times as many Americans died in drunk driving crashes than were killed in the Vietnam War.

As you see the grim reaper taking students and their obituaries being read, please think of the many possible consequences involved with making the life altering decision to drink and drive, to getting in a vehicle with someone who is impaired, or knowingly allowing someone to drive when they are impaired.

The entire student body and staff were dismissed to the intersection on River Lane for a simulation. Many parents, community members and guests joined to observe this outdoor assembly. Approximately 1,800 spectators were in attendance. At 12:45 PM a simulation of a crash involving alcohol began and included:

- Living dead being led out by the “Grim Reaper”
- Various roles of student actor/actresses being played out
- Multiple emergency response teams
- Extrication of students from a vehicle
- An assessment and arrest of a “drunk driver”
- One student “dies” at the scene
- A call to and response from the Washington County Medical Examiner
- A call to and response from Schmidt and Bartelt Funeral Home
- One student was transported via Flight for Life to Froedert Health/Community Memorial Hospital where she “passed away” later
- Another student was critically injured and transported to Froedert Health/Community Memorial Hospital by the Germantown Fire Department

After the simulation and videotaping of the hospital scenes, the thirty participants were put on a bus and taken to an undisclosed hotel for an overnight retreat. Students were not allowed to have cell phones or communicate with anyone other than those in the retreat. They, their friends, and families had to live with a lack of communication as if they had died. De-briefing activities were facilitated by Mrs. Bast and Mrs. Callahan at the hotel and students were given the letter written by their parent or parents prior to the event. The prompt for this was as follows:

Every 15 Minutes, someone in the United States dies from an alcohol related traffic collision and today you were killed. I never had the chance to tell you...

Those who had roles where they did not pass away had slightly different prompts linked to their specific roles. The students then wrote their own letter in response to their parent or parents, using a slightly different prompt (*Today I died and never had the chance to tell you...*) which were given to parents after the assembly the next day. Students then had dinner/dessert and some time for swimming and some fun activities. The video production crew finished processing the remaining parts of the video that was to be shown at the assembly on Friday, April 22. Their final tasks to complete this film concluded at approximately 6:30 AM.

Student participants returned from the hotel by bus to GHS at 7:00 AM on Friday morning and were able to interact with their parents before the assembly. Actors and actresses were seated at a pre-determined location and the "Living Dead" members were seated at desks that had a mock grave stone, a black rose and a locker decoration with their names, date of birth and date of mock "death." They were clothed with a custom made black t-shirt that had a glow in the dark Every 15 Minutes insignia on the front and glow in the dark last name on the back.

A pre-assembly presentation scrolled on the main video board for about five minutes before the assembly with some information and reminders for attendees. At 8:00 AM, all of the lights were turned off and the assembly began with introductory videos created by Mr. Farren and Tim Schabel and were entitled: "A History," "April 21, 2016 Summary" and "The Return of the Messengers." Those can be found [HERE](#). During the final song and video from the introductions, the "Living Dead" stood up, turned on a flameless candle and began a processional toward the stage. Each "Living Dead" member touched one of the two casket that signified the students who "died" and then proceeded to the stage. Candles were extinguished from east to west to signify the sun rising and setting, the final of the three songs concluded and the assembly began.

Mr. Farren welcomed, introduced and acknowledged the many guests, gave an introduction and explanation of the program, along with sharing the true stories of two Germantown High School students who died in separate one-car alcohol related accidents in 2007. The message of intent was made clear, including a statement that everything presented over the past two days would be defined as a "simulation," but that steps have been taken to make this as real as possible so all can experience the impact that poor choices can have and how wide-ranging the impact can be.

This was followed by the film created by the video production crew, which began with an introduction about fun, Germantown High School life, then led to a simulated underage drinking party, life stories of actors/actresses, all coming together for a car crash scene. Other aspects of the film included the student “drunk driver” being arrested, going through a court trial, and going to prison. Also within the video were multiple examples of the impact of poor decision on other’s lives, including significant others and parents/siblings. The movie can be found [HERE](#).

After this outstanding film, GHS senior Emma Brandenburg read the obituary of one of her fellow classmates, Bryce Thomas, which had been written by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas. Previous to the retreat, parents were asked to write a letter with the prompt, “Every 15 minutes, someone dies in an alcohol related crash and today I died, I never had the chance to tell you...” As noted above, students who did not “die” had a prompt related to their specific role and students wrote their letters of response on the night of the retreat.

During the assembly, Ms. Candis Mongan, mother of GHS junior, Kailynn Mongan, read her letter, followed by Kailynn reading one back to her mother. This was followed by the parents of GHS senior Jennifer Litzau, who had the role of being the student who “died at the scene” on Thursday and they shared their letter. GHS senior Jake Dufrane, who took the role of the “critically injured” (paralyzed) student, read this letter from a wheelchair while fitted with a halo and spoke of his altered life as a result of his injuries. GHS senior Spencer Pethan took on the role of the “drunk driver” and did a video presentation from the vantage point of being in an orange jumpsuit, in “jail” while talking on a phone through a plate-glass window.

All students and parents did a remarkable job in front of over 1,700 students, teachers, parents, donors and guests. It was a difficult task for each of them to do this, but they embraced their roles and did an incredible job of sharing their feelings and sentiments. The assembly concluded with a very special guest speaker, Mr. Mike Lutzenkirchen, who was featured on a special segment done by Tom Rinaldi on ESPN’s SportsCenter. Mike is the father of former Auburn All-American football player Philip Lutzenkirchen, who was killed in an alcohol related accident. Philip led a virtuous life but made a grave mistake. Mike travels around the country to send the message of the impact choices, under the mantra of “what legacy are you leaving?” I viewed the ESPN segment in November of 2014 and reached out to him several years ago, which led to him coming to speak to us. The ESPN piece can be found [HERE](#) and information on his mission can be found [HERE](#). His message was unique and very well-received as he talked about what led him to spread his message, but also spoke to how students need to look out for one another, to show what true friendship really is and to think about how one would be remembered if something happened to them.

Many individuals and organizations made this event possible and were acknowledged on the back of the program and in the credits on the video. A special thank you to State Farm Insurance, who awarded GHS with a \$100,000 grant for the “Celebrate My Drive” initiative that we participated in several months ago. 22% of those dollars are to be used for “safe-teen driving.” We were also blessed with a \$2,000 donation from Froedert Health/Community Memorial Hospital, \$1,000 from Germantown Youth Futures, \$850 from Kiwanis of Germantown, \$250 from Dick’s Body Shop, food/beverages for student participants from Tom

Albeiro at Dental Professionals and Shelley Juedes, the Germantown School District Food Service Director.

Also, the program could not have been successful without the help of the following community partnerships and organizations: Germantown Police Department and Chief Peter Hoell, Washington County Sheriff's Department, Washington County District Attorney's Office, the Honorable Judge Todd Martens, Germantown Fire Department, Flight for Life, Holiday Inn Express, Schmidt and Bartelt Funeral Home-Menomonee Falls, Aldo's Pizza, Mrs. Susan Bast, Mrs. Cathie Callahan, Mr. Tom Kujawa, Mr. Jim Meixner, Ms. Rhonda Rhoades, Mr. Sean Neils, the GSD Technology Department, and especially Officers Ray Borden and Toni Olson and numerous other businesses and groups that have made this possible.

The concluding and culminating message from Mr. Farren was as follows:

"If this program helps one person to make a different or better decision, makes one person think twice about drinking and driving, using drugs and/or texting while driving, motivates someone to take away the keys of a friend who is impaired and should not drive, prevents someone from getting into a vehicle of a person that is impaired, or saves even one life, then we have accomplished our mission."

Thank you to all of the students, parents, community members and staff that participated, attended, or supported the various facets this worthy program. Also, a sincere thank you goes to the student body for their outstanding behavior, respect, and reverence during the outdoor portion of the assembly on Thursday and especially during the indoor assembly on Friday. Our students showed the ultimate respect for their peers, participants, parents, organizers, guest speakers, and all who put in an incredible amount of time on this project. I have received many compliments from GHS staff, GSD staff, teaching and administrative staff from other districts, parents, and community members, and media regarding how well behaved our student body was on Friday in an environment of over 1,700 spectators.

At the time of the posting of this exit report, the introductory videos and movie have been posted on our website.

E15M Introductory Videos-2016: <https://eduvision.tv/1?onuoDA>

E15M Movie-2016: <https://eduvision.tv/1?pHqoDA>

We are working on posting the full all-school assembly from April 22 and hope to have that posted soon.

A few articles, pictures and videos have been posted in local media outlets. Here are the links for those postings and other sites related to this program:

CBS58:

<http://www.cbs58.com/clip/12379795/anti-drunk-prom>

AM620 and WTMJ4:

<http://www.wtmj.com/news/students-get-real-world-education-on-dangers-of-drunk-driving>

Germantown Now:

<http://www.germantownnow.com/news/205333051.html>

<http://www.germantownnow.com/userstoriessubmitted/376962431.html>

Express News:

<http://discoverhometown.com/germantown-hs-stages-every-15-minutes-events>

Guest speaker: Mike Lutzenkirchen:

<http://espn.go.com/video/clip?id=11878976>

<https://lutzie43.org/>

<https://vimeo.com/120004341>

Copies of the DVD that was shown on Friday have been given to the participating members. All items will be posted on YouTube in the near future as well. If we stay with the same plan, the next production will be in April of 2019. Until then, please take to heart this important message, look out for one another and embrace what you saw and/or heard over this two-day period. If you have any questions or comments regarding this report, feel free to contact me at (262) 502-7291 or jfaren@germantown.k12.wi.us