

# **“Every 15 Minutes Program” at Germantown High School**

## **April 25 & 26, 2019-Final Exit Report**

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

On Thursday, April 25 and Friday, April 26, Germantown High School presented 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, held the event at GHS in 2016 and attended Greendale High School’s 2017 production.

This program’s purpose is to dramatically instill 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 a guest speaker who lost his All-American college football player son to a drinking and driving accident (2016). For our 2019 production, GHS senior Madison Griebel shared the story of her parents and family through a video and presentation.

Planning for the 2019 production began in the summer of 2018 with Mr. Joel R. Farren, Germantown High School Principal; Officers Bob Case and Toni Olson, Germantown Police Department School Resource Officers; Mrs. Susan Bast, School Counselor; and Ms. Stephanie Kaebisch, School Social Worker. After the initial meetings, others joined the planning team, including Mr. Tom Kujawa, Germantown High School English and Mass Communications Teacher, who assembled a student-led video production crew that consisted of: Jack Brahm, Jack Braun, Cole Brzakala, Ben Chitwood, Josie Coulthurst, Skylr Daczka and Jasmine Nakum. School Resource Officer, Cathy Pierce (Kennedy Middle School), also joined the efforts.

With the assistance of the School Counseling Staff, teacher recommendations and coach/advisor recommendations, students were selected for the roles of “The Living Dead.” With 1,311 students enrolled and only about 20-25 available spots, this was a challenging process. In addition, the movie 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 13, 2019. All had to opt in or opt out after this meeting and choose to continue with their participation or not.

Many additional meetings and consultation sessions were held with a number of community partnerships and donors who help to make this event possible. All were acknowledged at the end of the student created film and in the assembly program as well. There were twenty-one students involved in the role of “The Living Dead” and six who took on an actor/actress roles. An additional seven students worked on the video; one helped create the introductory videos and did some technical work on the film (GHS senior Ben Chitwood); one student videotaped the assembly; and three students worked on the artwork for t-shirt design and/or the assembly program.

On Thursday morning at 7:15 AM, Mr. Lehnerer, Assistant Principal, made an announcement regarding the upcoming events of the morning, 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 5<sup>th</sup>, with previous presentations in 2007, 2010, 2013 and 2016.*

*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 7:18 AM and concluding at 9:56 AM, predetermined student participants were pulled out of class by a “Grim Reaper,” (Washington County Retired Deputy Ron Rewerts) at a designated site and time. Germantown Police Chief Peter Hoell and Captain Mike Snow 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 50 minutes. The statistic has improved from every 15 minutes to every 50 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 48 minutes due to an alcohol related crash. Today, 30 people in the United States will die due to an alcohol related traffic crash. In 2017, 10,874 individuals died in an alcohol-related traffic collision, which accounts for 32% of all traffic deaths.*

*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. Ask yourself, if you are in a position to prevent this, "what are you prepared to do?"*

At approximately 12:40 PM, 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 1,700 spectators were in attendance. At 12:55 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 twenty-seven 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 Ms. Kaebisch at the hotel and students were also 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 25. Their final tasks to complete this film concluded at approximately 4:00 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 tables that had a mock grave stone, a black rose, a flameless Chinese lantern 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 Ben Chitwood and were entitled:

- April 25 Morning
- April 25 Afternoon
- The Return of the Messengers

As a picture of each Living Dead member was projected during the final song, the “Living Dead” members turned on the LED for their Chinese lantern, which was in the order they were taken out of class the previous day. In the last minute of the song, they then processed to the stage area to prepare for the assembly, 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 movie production crew, which began with an introduction about life choices, then 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. This version of the movie concluded with a message of hope for making better choices, presented in a simulation from the parent of the student who took on the role of the drunk driver and from his professional role as a pastor at Crossway church (Mr. Esposito).

After this outstanding film, GHS junior Avi Bhavsar read the obituary of one of his fellow classmates, Madison Dier, which had been written by Mr. and Mrs. Dier. 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, Mrs. Alisha Mir-Marwood, mother of GHS senior Miya Marwood, read her letter, followed by Miya reading one back to her mother. This was followed by the parents of GHS senior Dawson Stroik, who had the role of being the student who “died at the scene” on Thursday and they shared their letter. GHS senior Kyle Farina, 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 Ethan Esposito took on the role of the “drunk driver” and shared a presentation from his vantage point, while being in an orange jumpsuit. 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, GHS senior Madison (Maddy) Griebel. I shared the following background information at the assembly as a prelude to her video presentation:

*With this being our 5<sup>th</sup> production, much thought was given to what kind of message we would share with you today. When one production ends, I take a little time off from it, then begin planning in my own head what could be done the next time. This includes listening to a lot of different music and viewing YouTube videos of similar events, while working out and typing notes into my phone for future consideration.*

*In late May of 2017, I was in attendance at the Germantown Community Scholarship Fund Awards Ceremony in what was our Upper Auxiliary Gym. It is one of the few times I do not have to present for an event and I was standing in the back observing. Within that program I was struck by the presentation given by a family and a student on behalf of her parents.*

*I was moved at the ability of an underclassmen to get up on stage and give an award away in memory of she and her family's deceased parents. Having lost both of my parents as well, one unexpectedly my senior year of college in 1994 and one due to illness in 2008, I felt a connection to this presentation, and although I did not personally know the student or family, I was aware of what had happened several years prior to that presentation.*

*In the fall of 2018, I asked to meet with Maddy Griebel and shared with her my thoughts on her presentation and then spoke of the Every 15 Minutes program, mission and intent. After she had some discussion with her family and some self-reflection, she decided that she would share her story with all of you today. In our many discussions, it was found that we share an anniversary as the loss of her parents occurred on April 25, which was the same date as the sudden passing of my mother many years ago.*

*I give her the utmost respect for being willing to do this in a venue of this type, but her intentions match well with our mission, which is prevention. With that, Maddy created a video with the assistance of Ben Waldron and Jay Snow at Crossway Church and then she will speak to you personally after this video presentation.*

Maddy then spoke candidly to the attendees as a follow-up to her video and shared the message that these types of things can happen to anyone. It was a powerful message from peer to peer, versus another adult telling kids what they should and should not do. She did an outstanding job and should be commended for her presentation.

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 back in 2015. 22% of those dollars are to be used for "safe-teen driving," which we apply to programs like this one.

We were also blessed with financial donations, including: \$2,000 from GHS Student Council, \$2,000 from Froedert Health/Community Memorial Hospital, \$1,500 from Germantown Youth Futures, \$800 from Kiwanis of Germantown, \$150 from Landmark Credit Union, \$150 from Goff's Auto Body, \$100 from First Bank Financial Services and \$100 from State Farm Insurance. Other goods were also donated to the program, including: the Germantown School District Food and Nutrition Department, The Flower Source, Hartford Community Services, Robert's Frozen Custard, GoRiteway, Schmidt and Bartelt Funeral Services-Menomonee Falls and Walmart.

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, Captain Mike Snow, Washington County Sheriff's Department, Washington County District Attorney's Mandy Schepper and Peter Cannon, the Honorable Judge Todd Martens, Germantown Fire Department, Flight for Life, Holiday Inn Express, Aldo's Pizza, Homer's Towing, Majestic Engraving Corporation.

A final thank you to staff who dedicated many hours to this program: Mrs. Susan Bast, Ms. Stephanie Kaebisch, Mr. Tom Kujawa, Mr. Jim Meixner, Ms. Rhonda Rhoades, Mr. Sean Neils, the GSD Technology Department, and especially Officers Bob Case, Toni Olson and Cathie Pierce.

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.

Several videos have been posted to the Germantown School District's website, utilizing the Eduvision system. This includes three multi-media videos shown at the April 26, 2019 assembly. Please click on the link below to take you to the full site:

<https://germantown.eduvision.tv/default.aspx>

Or, here are the direct links to each video on Eduvision:

- 1) Introductory videos that began the assembly: <https://eduvision.tv/1?eyeAgR>
- 2) E15M movie production: <https://eduvision.tv/1?eyeAOy>
- 3) Full assembly recording: <https://eduvision.tv/1?eyeLRO>

Here are the direct links to each video on YouTube:

- 1) Introductory videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyTrYyF2Alo>
- 2) E15M movie production: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGY5-UMGU9I&t=7s>
- 3) Full assembly recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEob6gTtRoc>

If we stay with the same plan, the next production will be in April of 2022. 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 [jfarren@gsdwi.org](mailto:jfarren@gsdwi.org)