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Students at Martin's South Fork High learn of the heartbreak from DUI fatalities

By Melissa E. Holsman

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Photo by Juan Dale Brown

South Fork High School students had an assembly on Thursday afternoon that concentrated on DUI prevention. One of the speakers, Renee Napier, talked about her daughter, Meagan Napier and her friend Lisa Dickson, pictured in background. The two were killed by a drunk driver, Eric Smallridge, in May 2002.

STUART — Two tragedies just weeks apart resulting in the 2002 deaths of four young people brought together a trio of speakers Thursday to South Fork High School on a shared mission to stop teens from driving drunk.

Students throughout the day packed into the school's auditorium to hear Renee Napier, whose daughter and best friend were killed May 11, 2002 by a drunken driver. Napier took the stage with Tim Stone and Stephen Bromstrup during a DUI prevention program sponsored by the school district and the Martin County Sheriff's Office.

"I want to stop DUI, that's important to me," said Napier, before presenting to a mostly senior class the story of how her 20-year-old daughter Meagan Napier, and her friend Lisa Dickson, 20, died instantly when the car they were in was hit from behind and careened into a tree in the North Florida city of Gulf Breeze.

Bromstrup, 23, served almost six years in prison for causing the June 17, 2002, alcohol-related crash that killed Stone's daughter, Sarah Stone, 14, and Alexandra Wetherbee-Quaroni, 13, and injuring four others.

"I don't want another family to suffer the way me and my family and the Stones and other families have had to suffer by losing someone in a tragedy that can be prevented," Napier said. "It's very senseless; it's all about choices."

Napier's scheduled to visit Indiantown Middle School on Friday.



Photo by Juan Dale Brown

Stephen Bromstrup gives a hug to Catherine Hammond after Bromstrup participated in a DUI prevention program at South Fork High School Thursday morning to talk to students about the dangers of drinking and driving. Bromstrup plead no contest to two counts of vehicular homicide in connection with an accident where he was driving in June of 2002.

Through the use of stirring videos, Power Point photos and emotionally-charged personal stories, Napier, Stone and Bromstrup spoke of a common theme: driving drunk or driving recklessly can be a fatal choice that shatters lives forever.

Napier began her presentation with a gut-wrenching video of the man now serving an 11-year prison term after being convicted of two counts of DUI manslaughter for killing Meagan Napier and Dickson.

Eric Smallridge, 24 at the time of the crash, was seen in the video dressed in jail garb, shackled and crying, making a passionate plea to a judge, who initially sentenced him to 22 years behind bars,

At Smallridge's sentencing, Napier said she told him she forgave him, and more important, she said, he apologized to both families.

"That was an apology we desperately needed to hear," said Napier.

Bromstrup said listening to Napier was a powerful experience, and she delivered a message that can't help but sink in.

"I can relate to many of the specific aspects of her situation and it helps me see exactly what I did and that in turn, helps me portray my message better to the kids," Bromstrup said. "Not only does it help other people but it helps me as well — it makes me feel better inside."

Seeing the crumpled gold Mazda on display in the school's courtyard that claimed Meagan Napier's life, he said, brought back the enormity of the tragedy he caused the day he drank some beers, blew through a stop sign and T-boned a Cadillac, killing Stone and Quaroni.

"Seeing the videos and the pictures of Ms. Napier's experience really hit home with me because it was two girls," he said. "I can imagine how much of an impact it is on the kids here because it was a huge impact on me, seeing the car."

When Bromstrup took the stage, he became overwhelmed with emotion, often tearing up and frequently had to pause to regain composure. When he spoke, the 500-plus students barely moved.

"Seeing the pictures of Meagan and the whole case with Ms. Napier brings everything back and is very difficult," he told the students. "It gives me an in-your-face outlook on

everything I destroyed. Reality was shoved directly in my face and believe me, it was scary.”

South Fork student Valerie Adamek, 17, of Tequesta, later said she was moved by the presentation. She and a group of girls nearby said they also knew the three Stuart teens killed in August in an alcohol-related crash on Cove Road.

“It’s really hard to understand but when you’re presented with people like Stephen and Ms. Napier, it is effective and brings the light to kid’s eyes that we are not invincible,” said Adamek, who currently drives. “It really meant a lot to be here.”

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