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YAC Workshop Draws Attention to Teen Driving Distractions



Perris Mayor Michael Vargas flashes the "thumbs up" sign while addressing teenagers during the April 29 workshop at the City of Perris.

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Teenage drivers don't always get a second chance to make a good decision. That was the message repeated throughout the day at a "Distracted Driving Workshop" in the City of Perris that drew more than 70 teenagers, many new drivers and some about to get their first licenses. They heard poignant testimonies on video from distracted drivers whose inattention caused crashes that killed loved ones, injured friends, destroyed futures, and devastated families. They discovered that 4,000 teenagers die in traffic accidents each year and 75 percent are the result of distracted drivers who took their eyes off the road for a second or two to text, talk on the phone or just to switch a radio station – just long enough to lose control and end in tragedy. The workshop at the Bob Glass Gymnasium was organized by the City's Youth Advisory Committee and marked the latest effort to address issues facing teenagers in 2017. YAC teens previously organized an anti-bullying workshop, hosted monthly "open mic nights" at the City's Teen Center, volunteered at community improvement days, and last year won an award from the American Planning Association for their "Photovoice" project, which documented areas of Perris in need of a little tender, loving care.



Perris Youth Advisory Committee Secretary Courtney Hamilton, 15, described a crash her family was involved in that was caused by a distracted driver.

Perris Mayor Michael Vargas and City Councilman Malcolm Corona attended the April 29 distracted driving workshop. As a retired law officer, Vargas said he has seen "some horrific accidents" while on the job and urged the teens to take the message of caution behind the wheel to heart. "You need to learn now," Vargas said. "The best place for your cell phone is in the trunk of your car." Vargas said he is proud of the YAC members for organizing events like the driving safety seminar, pointing out that the program took on regional significance with the appearance of about 15 teenagers from Ontario. Councilman Corona praised the YAC for bringing to light issues that confront teenagers on a daily basis. "It is important to show our support for youth and to make sure we do everything we can to see teenagers remain safe," he said. "It's important for youth to see that we care about and support their activities."



Perris City Councilman Malcolm Corona counts backwards while trying to arrange geometric patterns during the Distracted Driving Workshop Saturday, April 29, at the Bob Glass Gymnasium.

Distracted driving dangers
Danger can take many forms for young and inexperienced drivers. Speeding, drugs and alcohol, even prescription medications are well-known "no-no's" when operating a vehicle. So are talking and texting while driving. But others lurk as well—combing hair, sipping from a soda can or water bottle, snacking on a candy bar, tuning the radio, combing hair or even looking back for an instant at rear seat passengers can trigger a deadly crash.

YAC Secretary Courtney Hamilton, 15, fought back tears as she described the accident her family was in last year that was caused by an inattentive driver. Thankfully no one was injured, but the crash left an indelible impression. Courtney, a sophomore at Citrus Hill High School, thanked the City for supporting the YAC program. "It provides information about the issues that affect people's lives," she said.

The seminar included several demonstrations to drive home the dangers of impaired and distracted driving. A popular demonstration consisted of putting on a pair of eyeglasses that distorted the position and shapes of nearby objects, a common result of alcohol or drug use. Participants were asked to build a pyramid by placing plastic cups on top of one another—a task many could not complete because of their impaired view.

Perris High School senior Tanya Loreda, 17, said the seminar forced teens to take stock of the choices they make when getting behind the wheel. "Some teens who are just starting to drive do careless things like texting," Tanya said. "If they learn the dangers, hopefully they'll be less likely to do those kinds of things."



A teenager dons special glasses that distort the eyesight, making stacking a pyramid of plastic cups a much more challenging task, part of the April 29 workshop hosted by the Perris Youth Advisory Committee.

Learning from Perris
The contingent from Ontario included Senior Recreation Leader Christian Cummings, who said that the City is adopting Perris as a model for its youth advisory committee. Unlike Perris, which allows its YAC to plan and organize its own programs, the Ontario youth committee took its lead from the City, which until recently planned teen-related programs. Members of the Ontario youth advisory committee were allowed to volunteer at events planned by municipal staff. No more. Now the youth committee will plan youth-related activities in Ontario. Cummings said he is impressed that Perris officials place such confidence in its YAC. The responsibility and trust placed in them by City officials constitutes "a great learning experience" and a good way to learn responsibility. "Perris puts so much trust in its teens," Cummings said. "That's just not the norm."

