

Teens and driving

NEW PROGRAM TEACHES THEM THE RULES OF THE ROAD

By SHARON MACGREGOR

As parents, we are also our child's first teacher. The early stuff like potty training, the A-B-C's, 1-2-3's and so on bring their own challenges. Then, our children grow and mature, and the subjects get more serious and involve life and death issues: sex, drugs, and driving. It's both an exciting time where your child steps into adulthood, but scary as well when you think about your child behind the wheel of a car.

The dread and fear adults feel at this time is very real, and teaching them the honest facts about teen driving deaths should not be ignored. In fact, this should be covered along with the rules of the road. Teachable moments can begin with a simple question: "Do you know what the leading cause of teenage deaths is?" And be blunt. "Motor vehicle accidents." The follow-up? "What do you think is the number one reason for this statistic?" Teens usually answer "drinking and driving," but the true response is "It is speed related."

A new teen driving program helps parents

Laurie Salkin, a mother of two teen drivers and a manager for the William A. Smith & Son, Inc. insurance firm, thought to herself, "Here I am insuring teen drivers, but who is educating them? Who is telling them about speeding and cell phone use, and of the 6,000 cell phone-related accidents that occurred in the United States in 2009?" Salkin put what she learned into a presentation to parents and teens that outlines the

facts about distracted driving. *Stand Together*, has been gaining in popularity in the Orange County area having already been presented at various religious organizations and high schools and winning the support of the NYS Troopers' office; Judge Forrest Strauss, Past President of the Orange County Bar Association; Joel Finkelstein a personal injury attorney from Goshen, and a teen crash survivor who was behind the wheel that resulted in a teen fatality. The program includes their shared knowledge and experience, gripping videos and true life stories, *Stand Together* has become a very sought-after presentation, especially this time of year. (See the riveting video, *The Last Text* at HVParent.com)

May is perfect time to discuss teen driving rules

Salkin remarks that "May is prom season, and so is the perfect time for reminding teen drivers about the dangers of driving distracted or impaired." In fact, John S. Burke High School in Goshen offered the *Stand Together*



Even if your child passes their road test, don't have them take off with the car before agreeing to a parent-teen contract.

program in May 2010, and is hosting another presentation this month. "Rather than have it be an evening program, which allows the kids and parents to opt out of going, we're holding it during the school day as an assembly for juniors and seniors," Salkin explains. "There's no excuse not to see it."

Jeanne Bozich from the Archdiocese Drug Abuse Prevention Program (ADAPP) heard about *Stand Together* and brought it to Burke in 2010. "I asked the kids in the days that followed what they thought, and most of them said it made them think twice before getting into a car when drinking, or with someone else who had been drinking." Many, she said, made a conscious decision not to text while driving.

Our multi-tasking teens

This generation is so accustomed to multi-tasking: listening to their iPods, checking their Facebook and cell phone messages while doing homework. Add to that their feeling of invincibility and the notion that "it will never happen to me," and we have an age group destined for making poor judgments while driving.

Salkin provides a few suggestions for parents of new drivers, "Parents need to be a good example, and create a contract with specific promises and consequences. (*HVParent.com* has your copy of the parent-teen driving contract.)

Parent guidelines

- Always be the example and never use your own cell phone while driving, even if your child is not yet a teen. It should simply be your own safe practice like fastening your seat belt.
- Just simply turn the cell

(Continued on Page 36)

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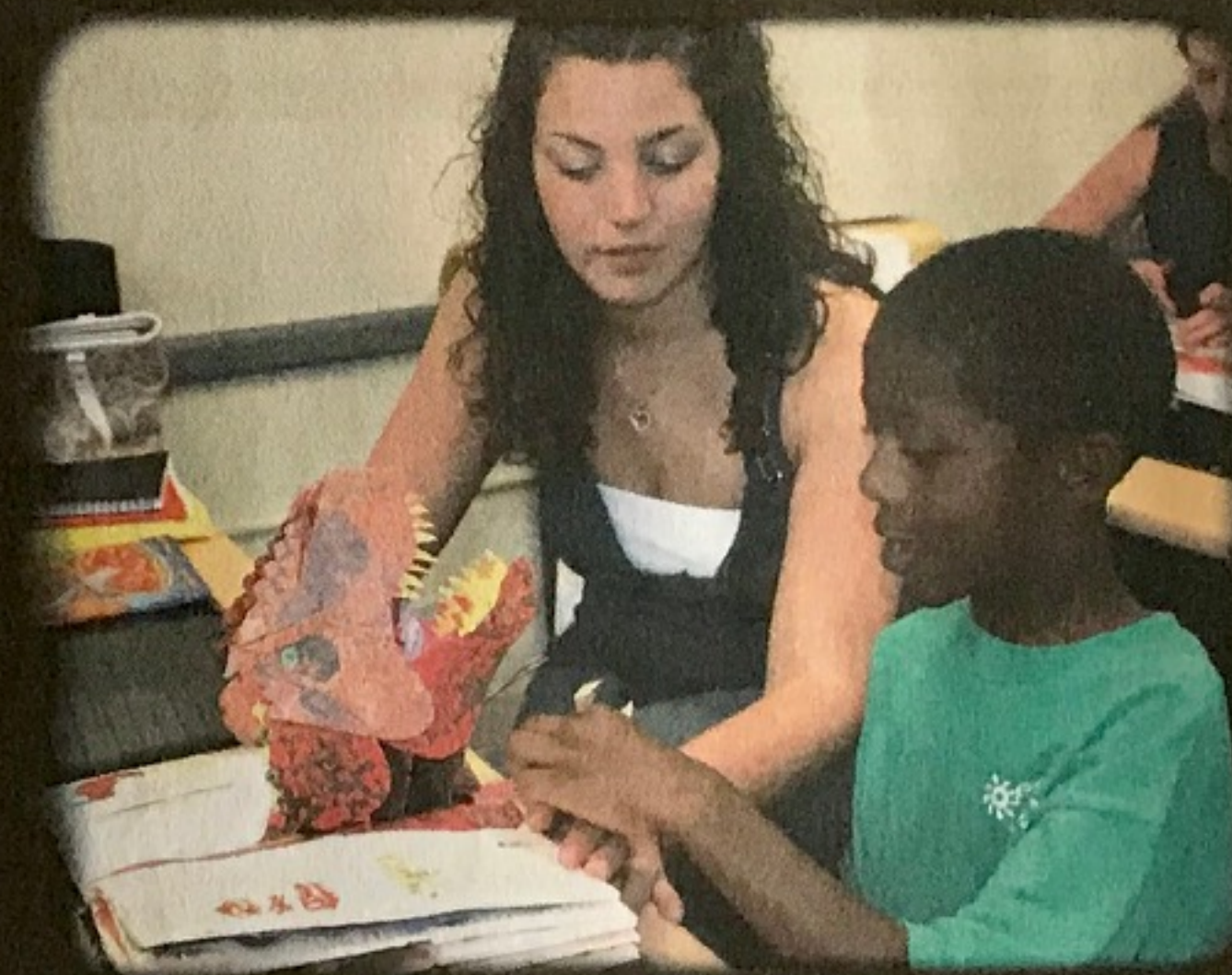
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TEEN DRIVING

(Continued from Page 35)



Teens rally around the "No cell phone zone" ideas. *photo courtesy Stand Together*

phone off while driving. Traffic Supervisor and Sgt. Scott Mohl of Troop F advises, "Turn it off, and when you get to your destination you can turn it back on." Salkin agrees and adds, "Or turn it to silent and put the phone away. If you have to use the cell phone, pull over. Using your cell phone while driving is now two points on your license and a \$150 fine."

Empower your teen to make as many safe choices as possible. If they know their friends will try to use their cell phones while driving, let your teen know it's okay to speak up. If they feel unsafe getting into a car, make a pact that they can call you for a ride. This means regardless of time or circumstance,

you'll pick them up and keep them safe. Salkin tells teen drivers, "You have the right to be safe. You can be saving your life and the driver's life too. It doesn't have to happen to you. Speak up."

Educate kids about the mechanics, laws and all safety elements that go along with the responsibility of driving. See if your child's high school participates in teen driver safety programs. Sgt. Moll explained some groups bring driving simulators to area schools so students can experience the effects of talking on the phone while driving, which are similar to those of an intoxicated driver.

When asked the one lesson she hopes young drivers take from these programs, Salkin says, "Every time you get in a car, you are making a decision and every single person that's on the road is loved by somebody. They are a child, mother, father, brother or sister, and your split decision can affect that person's life and your own forever. And you are loved by somebody, too. You have to be safe and you have to be smart and you have to always make the right decision—life can change in a split second."

For more information on the "Stand Together" program, contact Laurie Salkin at 845-561-1706, ext. 221. Or facebook.com/pages/Stand-Together-Incorporated-Teens-Who-Care-Drive-Aware.

Sharon MacGregor is a freelance writer and columnist who lives in the Bloomingburg area with her husband and two sons.

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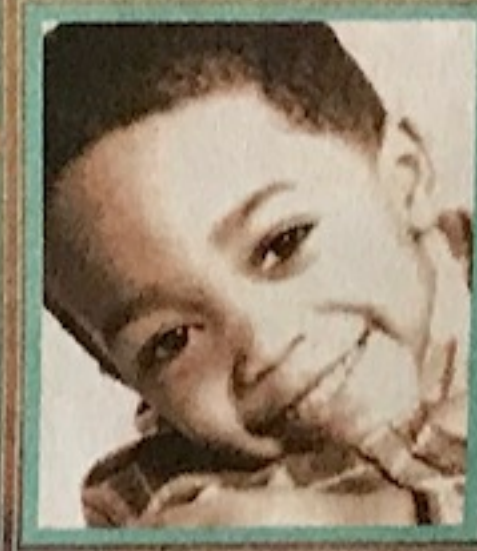
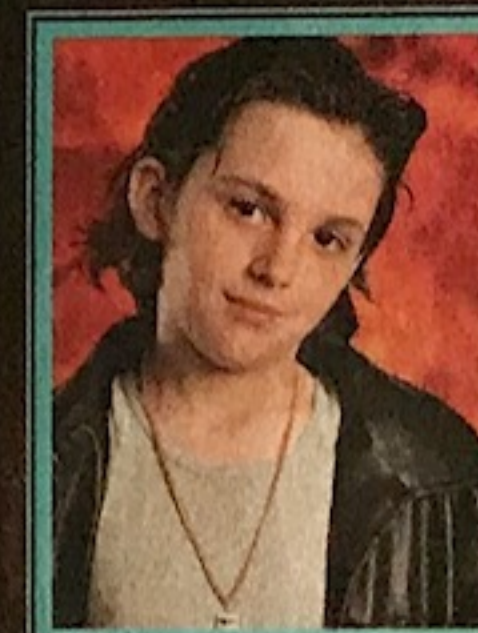
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