

# Helping teens make better decisions

*TMHS P.A.C. brings Cara Filler to Tewksbury*

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TEWKSBURY- Every parent handing the car keys to a teen remembers the first time they got behind the wheel, and the things they did once they got there. A program for high school seniors this week aims to keep teens safe while driving.

The Tewksbury Memorial High School PAC and the student group S.A.D.D. (Students Against Destructive Decisions) have teamed up to bring a special speaker to talk to high school seniors on the topics of peer pressure and traffic safety.

Cara Filler lost her twin sister in a drunk driving accident just one day after their 18th birthday. The tragedy inspired Filler to turn her grief into a speaking platform to help teens get themselves out of sticky situations, and possibly save lives.

S.A.D.D., according to faculty adviser, Andy Bellistri, has about 15 students come weekly on Thursday afternoons to work on a variety of outreach activities. S.A.D.D. members come from every class, though sophomores are more involved. Filler's program popped up on Bellistri's radar screen after she spoke at the SADD national conference.

"She is one of the most powerful and inspirational speakers that they've ever seen," said Bellistri. Bellistri is an English teacher at the high school and took on the group this year.

This is one of the many programs sponsored by the active high school PAC. PAC Co-Chair Maura Rausedo highlighted other upcoming events include Travis Roy, Spinal Cord Injury Survivor, speaking to freshmen and sophomores on April 15, and a PAC sponsored field trip for the junior class and their parents to attend a college fair at the Boston Expo Center one evening in early April.

Such enriching programs are made possible through major fundraising efforts like the second annual Team Trivia Night, coming up Thursday, April 9, at the Tewksbury Country Club. The entertaining, competitive evening gathers teams around tables to answer a variety of trivia questions, and tickets are only \$20 per person or \$200 for a table. Last year the event sold out. This year organizers like Rausedo have added a few more tables and encourage any interested parties to contact them right away through the PAC to reserve a spot: they're going fast.

Over the course of the year SADD takes on a number of projects to raise awareness including the National Red Ribbon project, which had students tying red ribbons onto car windshield wipers and antennae so that every time the driver gets into the car, they receive a direct reminder against driving while impaired.

"I look at my own car and still see some others in the faculty parking lot with the ribbons on them," said Bellistri, noting that many ribbons lasted from November. "If we can prevent one destructive decision, then we've done a great job."

Another topic the group tackled was teen dating violence. Just recently a SADD member found an informative article in Seventeen Magazine, which the group copied and handed out to everyone in school. That very night a high profile case of dating violence, between entertainers Chris Brown and Rhianna, came out in the news.

Additionally, the SADD group currently travels to the Wynn Middle School to talk with students about the Friends of Rachel (FOR) program. The FOR draws on the experiences of Rachel Scott, the first person killed during the Columbine massacre in April 1999.

"Everyone is a valuable and contributing member of the community here at TMHS," said Bellistri. "The Friends of Rachel program works to create a positive school environment and cut down on negativity and bullying."

By working with the middle school, SADD/FOR members help ease the transition to high school as well as encourage students to stay in Tewksbury and attend TMHS.