

# USA Safe Night Holds Local Celebrations

Lancaster Farming, Saturday, July 10, 1999-B19

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**GREENSBURG** (Westmoreland Co.) — The local edition of the national event called "Safe Night USA" featured a rap artist/health educator from Philadelphia and local groups. Rap artist Sterlen Barr involved the audience in his performance and brought a strong personal message against using tobacco.

"The tobacco companies have lied to us" he said. "They try to make you think smoking is grown up, fun and sexy. What you don't see is yellow teeth, or people hooked up to a lung machine."

In addition to the anti-tobacco/drug message, "Safe Night USA" educates on the principles of conflict resolution to help youth handle arguments. And to avoid what the Center for Disease Control has identified as a threat to children's health, the program declares, "No guns."

The Greensburg edition was one of hundreds of local events on June 5, called Safe Night USA. The evening emphasized three rules for having a safe night:

- no weapons
- no drugs or alcohol
- no arguments

Begun in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the safe night concept emphasizes that parents and youth can work together to make their communities safe and that it is fun to come together with others. The target age is appropriate for the strong anti-smoking message: According to health educator Sterlen Barr, youth are viewed by the tobacco industry as the "replacement smokers." And the industry spends \$6.2 billion in advertising, 90% which goes into the top "youth" brands: Marlboro, Newport and Camel.

Barr also noted that the three top causes of preventable death in the United States center around the use of legal drugs: 1. Smoking and chewing snuff. 2. Drinking alcohol. 3. Second hand smoke. Barr also noted that if a person can graduate from high school without becoming a user, they probably would stay tobacco-free for life.

The national broadcast on PBS and a number of smaller

cable networks featured the originator of the safe night idea from Milwaukee, Olusegun "Olu" Sijuwade, Safe Night Founder. Part of what he said included: "Safe Night USA, it's not just a one night event. Make it happen and keep it going."

And Sijuwade has proven that safe night can work. From his position as a former police officer, he and the Safe Nights in Milwaukee, Wisconsin have been credited as a key factor in a 60 percent drop in juvenile homicide. The Wisconsin Safe Night on November 15, 1996 had more than 100 Safe Nights in both urban and rural communities all across the state.

On the "Living Proof" web page, many testified to the effective results of Safe Nights on their lives, such as Gavin Hoesly, student and Safe Night participant who says: "I used to be a couch potato, but Safe Night gave me the chance to see my friends and have a lot of fun." or Dr. Bill Bartlett, retired pediatrician, member of the American Academy of Pediatrics who says "Safe Night USA is an opportunity to provide our youth with positive alternatives to violence and substance abuse."

The Safe Night USA broadcast on June 5 (9 p.m.) on PBS (Public Broadcasting System) and BET (Black Entertainment Television). The national event united youth and Safe Night planners in one multimedia celebration. The live show included all the elements of a Safe Night—the three rules, an educational component, and good clean fun.

In the broadcast, celebrities who have made it big in the entertainment industry, those will on their way to stardom and others who are part of the solution paid tribute to America's young people and Safe Night planners across the country. They helped teach conflict resolution, sing and add comedy to the hour-long show.

The celebrity line-up included some of the following:

Wayne Brady of ABC's *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*

Doug E. Doug of CBS' acclaimed *Cosby* Adimu of BET's award-winning show *Teen Summit*;

Actor Benito Martinez from the movie *Outbreak*;

Award-winning vocalist Crystal Lewis;

New recording artist Morley Kamen;

Naughty by Nature — Rap Music's Favorite Trio, Hip-Hop Artists;

The Mixed Generation "Mixed G" — Recording Artists, Conflict Resolution Facilitators; No Authority, Recording Artists.

The broadcast originated from three major hubs: BET studios in Washington, DC; Church of the Harvest in Los Angeles; Milwaukee Auditorium, Milwaukee, Wisconsin where Safe Night began.

Three live Safe Night parties served as a backdrop for the television show, plus the cameras dropped in on Safe Night parties in Miami; Detroit; Shelton, Washington, near Seattle; and Paducah, Kentucky.

**Making A Difference**  
Here are three short stories profiling people and programs making a difference in their communities. Each story relates to one of the three Safe Night rules:

• **No Weapons:** In Santa Fe, New Mexico, Victor "Tito" Rivera has turned a life of gangs and violence into one of mentoring and caring for kids at risk.

• **No Alcohol or Drugs:** New York City. Scot Anthony Robinson, an actor and former drug and alcohol abuser, now carries his message of hope to young people through a drug prevention program.

• **No Arguments:** Elementary, middle and high schools in the seaport town of Newport, Oregon, teach peer mediation and conflict resolution training. On the national broadcast, students shared their experiences and responses to the program.

The Safe Night USA theme song and public service announcements are available for download from the Safe Night USA web site at the following address: <http://www.pbs.org/safenight/plan.htm>

**Some Samples from the world wide web message board**

In addition to the suggestions for planning and testimonials, the PBS web site provided an opportunity for planners to get help for specific problems or ask advice. Here is a sample of some of that dialogue:

Gail Boothe (weboothe@aol.com) from the Nevada Community Resource center asked on Friday, May 21, about security for their local event. She said: "I am organizing a safe night in Nevada, Iowa. I am curious about how other small communities are handling security. We have had bomb threats at the school and I am concerned that "Safe Night" is like a challenge

for some kids to try and make it not a safe night. I'd love suggestions." Several people responded with ideas.

On a similar note, Jennifer Young (naprc@fullnet.net) from the Norman Area Prevention Resource Center asked on April 19: "I work in a rural area school and I targeted middle school age (grades 6-8).

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Jeff Sarault, Cindy Arblaster, and Sterlen Barr confer prior to the "Safe Night USA" event in Greensburg. Jeff, a 4-H member from Westmoreland County, has gone professional with his entertainment services and provides music for weddings and dances. Cindy Arblaster is the extension agent for Youth in Westmoreland County, and Sterlen is a health educator from Southeastern, PA. Photo by David Hiebert.



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