

Confined to wheelchairs

Drunk-driving victims tell their stories

By CHARLOT M. DENMON
Staff Correspondent

It was on a late night in March, 1976, in a small town near York, Pa. A car driven by a 17-year old came speeding into the town at an estimated 110 miles per hour, tires squealed, the driver lost control, tried to brake but hit a concrete bridge. He was killed and his 15-year old passenger critically injured, his neck broken, his spinal cord damaged; he was paralyzed for life.

That 15-year old boy was John Heim and he was in a film "A Victim Speaks" presented recently to Dallas Junior and Senior High School students. The film was part of a program presented by the Dallas Parents and Kids Organization, a program on drinking and driving and what the results can be.

John Heim was not only in the film, but also appeared in person and spoke to the students. A second victim of drunk driving, Dan Severns, also appeared with John.

Dan was 17 years old when he went out for a "night on the town" had what he termed a "few" beers, but actually too many, and on the way home, lost control of his Volkswagen, hit a tree and like John, broke his neck. Now at age 26, he also is confined to a wheel chair.

Neither victim remembers the events of the nights that changed their lives. But both of them spoke to the students and explained that they didn't believe it could happen to them. "You know it can when it is too late," said John.

"I was at the age where I was beginning to feel independent. I thought, 'I can drink, I know how to handle it, nothing can happen - not to me.' It did happen to me. I have spent the past nine years in this wheel chair, completely dependent on others."

John has no use of his legs and, with the exception of several fingers on his right hand, no use of his arms or hands. That is why he is confined to a motorized wheel chair, one he can operate with one finger. His wrist flops



Dallas Post/Charlot M. Denmon

The victims

Dan Severns and John Heims, paraplegics, both of whom incurred broken necks and spinal injuries in drunken driving accidents seven years ago. The younger men spoke to Dallas High School students at special assemblies last week.

about; he can't control it. He is strapped in his chair, can't take care of any of his needs, but must depend on others.

He has been treated at a number of rehabilitation centers and now resides at Colonial Nursing Home in York, among many elderly persons. John is mentally alert, but is unable to do anything but sit and watch television. All because of alcohol and believing it could not happen to him.

Evelyn Mason, nurse at Colonial Manor, met John and asked John to speak to her teenage daughter and friends at school. At first John said no, that he couldn't speak but after numerous attempts, Evelyn convinced John to go.

Following his talk to the stu-

dents, John received hundreds of letters from the students encouraging him to talk to students at other schools. John was willing to go, but transporting him was a problem since John was six feet and weighed 150 lbs. He is dead weight and often has muscle spasms when attempts are made to put him in a car.

Evelyn Mason decided that John needed a special van with an electronic lift if he were to continue to speak. Insurance would not cover the van, so Evelyn arranged a \$20,000 loan and she and John co-founded "A Victim Speaks" as a non-profit organization.

Later, they met Dan Severns, also a paraplegic whom John had known in the hospital. When he learned what John was doing, Dan volunteered to go with John

and Evelyn and also talk to students about the dangers of drunken driving since he was the victim of his own driving while drinking accident.

Dan also suffered a broken neck but his spinal injury was injured in a slightly different manner than John's. Dan cannot move his legs, but he does have sufficient movement of his arms to allow him to use a manual wheel chair. He does need someone to help get him dressed, get him out of bed and into his wheel chair and to prepare his meals.

Dan lives at home, but when his parents are at work, he is at the mercy of a friend. If that friend is late or can't get to Dan's home, Dan must remain in bed until someone who can help him comes in. Sometimes, he has to stay in bed all day because no one comes around.

The two young men are completely dependent on the willingness of others to assist them in their eating, toilet needs, medication, and such. Both must be strapped in their chairs so they do not fall forward although Dan is able to drive a van which is especially equipped for him. He has two levers, one which he moves up and down for speed and braking, the other which he must turn in order to steer. "Something like rubbing your head in one direction and your stomach in the other," explained Evelyn Mason. "It's not easy."

"Go to your proms," John and Dan told the students. "We can't tell you not to drink but if you do, don't drive and don't ride with someone who has been drinking. Don't let what happened to us happen to you."

"Drunk driving is everyone's problem; unless statistics change, each and everyone of you will be affected by a drunk driving accident; something will happen to you, your family, or someone close to you. It can happen to you but don't let it," said John.

Executive board members of PAK (Parents and Kids) are Dr. Chuck LaJeunesse, president; Larry Schuler, vice president; Carolyn Catrambone, Marianne Williams, treasurer; JoAnn Hall and Charles Kirchner, members-at-large.

Social Security offers teleservice program

People living in the Wilkes-Barre area can save themselves time and money if they take advantage of Social Security teleservice, Thomas Lavelle, Social Security manager in Wilkes-Barre, said recently.

- By using teleservice, people can conduct most all of their Social Security business by telephone. The teleservice number can be found in the telephone directory under "Social Security Administration."
- Teleservice can be used to:
- Start an application for Social Security benefits or supplemental security income payments. The applications can be started by telephone and completed by mail.
 - Apply for Medicare.
 - Report a name or address change.
 - Report a change in marital status.
 - Report that a person has stopped or started to work or to report other events that may affect receipt of checks.
 - Report a lost or stolen check or delayed payment.
 - Report a lost or missing Social Security or Medicare card.
 - Get help in completing Medicare claims forms.
 - Request a copy of a person's Social Security earnings record.
 - Get help in requesting a review

of the decision made on a Social Security claim.

-Get the answer to any Social Security question.

Unless a person's business is urgent, it is best to wait until after the middle of the month to call. This is because the first part of the month is the busiest time in the Social Security office.

Seniors warned

Warnings to senior citizens are being made by officials of the Wilkes-Barre Social Security office to be on guard against insurance salespersons who claim to be Medicare representatives.

Thomas P. Lavelle, district manager, advises elderly residents that Social Security does not employ anyone to solicit door to door or call beneficiaries on the phone to provide Medicare information.

Social Security employees who make home visits carry U.S. government identification with their photograph on it which should be requested of any caller, by residents, before admitting such a person into their homes, Lavelle stated.



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LCCC offers new courses for Fall semester

Added to the list of new offerings for the Fall semester at Luzerne County Community College is a two-year associate degree program in Human Services.

The purpose of the curriculum is to provide academic and practical knowledge to students who are interested in careers within the human service field. The results of recent surveys taken of local human service agencies indicate that interest does exist in the establishment of such a curriculum and its graduates could be seen as fulfilling a variety of positions.

Specifically, those petitions include Human Service Aide, Geriatric workers, Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol and Youth Service workers as well as in personnel and Social Service departments. These positions would be available within Mental Health Agencies, Drug and Alcohol Agencies, hospitals, nursing homes and adult day-care centers.

The Human Services curriculum at its present state adds approximately seven new courses but also complements the college's Social Science courses presently being offered since they maintain the core of curriculum.

New courses offered through this program include Introduction to Human Services which provides an overview of many facets involved in

the human service professions—the roles and functions of human service workers, the history and major theoretical approaches to the helping service, and desirable attitudes and values.

Focusing on communication theory and skills, an Interviewing and Communications Skills course is offered and will review the techniques of interviewing, including many practice sessions.

Introduction to Counseling will also be offered and will provide the student with the theoretical models and basic principles involved in the counseling process. Emphasis will be placed on the applicability of

such models with the human service setting.

For further information on the Human Services curriculum at Luzerne County Community College contact Dr. Ann Williams, Social Science Department, 829-7404.

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