

*Symposium targets drinking

Teens can win \$1,000 scholarship

Since the word is in its name, it makes sense that the Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition is putting major emphasis on "prevention."

Toward that end, the coalition is organizing a Parent and Teen Symposium on Underage Drinking for Thursday evening, Sept. 9.

It will be held from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the School District Learning Center, corner of Palisades and Golden Eagle boulevards.

As a further enticement to attend, a local family has anonymously donated \$1,000 toward a college scholarship to be awarded that evening.

All FHUSD parents and students in attendance will be eligible for the drawing to win the college scholarship.

A panel of experts will talk at the symposium to both parents and teens on a number of issues related to underage consumption.

There will be information at the symposium for teens who have questions about drinking, peer pressure and other related issues.

Mayor Jay Schlum will kick off the event, and the symposium has the full endorsement of School Superintendent Dr. Bill Myhr, FHHS Principal Tom Lawrence and other school officials.

Dwight Johnson is helping organize the event.

A survey done this past spring reveals that among FHUSD students who report drinking, the average age for the onset of drinking among those students is 12.7 years old (typically

a seventh grader).

Some 42 percent of sophomores last year indicated they had had a drink of alcohol within the past 30 days.

Johnson said it is alarming numbers such as those which prompted the coalition to put together the symposium and hopefully reach out to parents.

Carole Groux, who directs the coalition, said it is the group's goal to change the "social norms" in Fountain Hills, particularly those surrounding underage alcohol consumption.

"Some parents believe it is normal behavior for high schoolers to drink, either because the parents did as teens or it just doesn't seem like that big of a deal," Groux said.

"Yet we know more today than we did 20 years ago about the irreversible effects underage drinking

can cause."

Unfortunately, Johnson said research has shown that a higher percentage of people show addictive tendencies toward alcohol and drugs the younger they start drinking as teenagers.

A "parent toolkit" will be handed out at the symposium as well for those who attend.

Grant money from the Fountain Hills Community Foundation was used by the coalition to purchase some items to be given out in the toolkits.

The coalition's mission statement is, "Through community-wide collaboration, Fountain Hills will work together to reduce substance abuse among youth ages 12-18 and, over time, among adults."

Information: fhcoalition@me.com or call (480) 639-0519.

'Medical Marijuana' fought

Opponents to battle Prop 203

By Michael Scharnow
Times Editor

A former Drug Enforcement Administration executive said Proposition 203 is bad news for Arizona.

He spoke last week at a meeting of the Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition.

"There are more medical marijuana dispensaries in Los Angeles than Starbucks," said Doug Hebert, a Fountain Hills resident.

Prop 203 is designed to legalize "medical marijuana" in Arizona, but opponents say the movement is a precursor to legalizing weed altogether.

In addition, Hebert said the proposed regulations remove law enforcement, employers and others from "touching" those who become legal medical marijuana smokers.

"The 35-page document circumvents every legal aspect of marijuana," he added. "There would be no authority over this."

The state's Department of Health Services would be mandated to administrate the program, but no funding would be mandated.

Fourteen states have already passed similar bills, and Hebert said problems continue to mount in California and Colorado.

The proposition would allow physicians to provide a written certification that a patient is likely to receive therapeutic benefits from marijuana.

That patient would then become a "cardholder" able to smoke medical marijuana.

The proposed regulations would allow a cardholder to possess up to two and a half ounces of marijuana every 14 days, the equivalent of up to 200 joints.

Others could become "designated caregivers" to medical marijuana cardholders, being allowed to grow marijuana in their homes and deliver it up to five patients.

A wide litany of ailments would qualify for marijuana certification under the proposed law, virtually opening up the drug to any patient, Hebert said.

MPP

The Arizona initiative is

funded by and organized by Washington, D.C.-based the Marijuana Policy Project.

The MPP states on its Web site: "Marijuana prohibition has failed. It's time for a new approach, and MPP is leading the way. Since our founding in 1995, we've been making real progress in reforming U.S. marijuana laws, by:

...lobbying for legislation and running ballot initiative campaigns to allow seriously ill patients to use medical marijuana with their doctors' recommendations

...lobbying for legislation and sponsoring ballot initiatives to replace marijuana prohibition with a sensible system of regulation....

"Because MPP believes that the greatest harm associated with marijuana is prison, we focus on removing criminal penalties for marijuana use, with



Doug Hebert

nol, which is a prescription medication that contains synthetic THC, the active ingredient in marijuana.

THC has been found to relieve the nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy for cancer patients and to assist with loss of appetite with AIDS patients.

"But you can't get high from Marinol, so that's why they are pushing for the legalization of pot," Hebert said.



Scottsdale counselor Michael Harmon said teens start taking drugs and get hooked on them simply because the drugs make them feel good.

a particular emphasis on making marijuana medically available to seriously ill people who have the approval of their doctors."

Opponents say MPP could sink \$3 million toward marketing efforts to get Prop 203 passed in Arizona.

Hebert, who is on the board of Partnership for a Drug Free America, said the Food and Drug Administration has not approved marijuana as a medicine, that it is highly addictive and that federal laws still remain against possessing and using marijuana.

"They will run a campaign designed to prey on the heartstrings of voters," Hebert said, "running all these patients out there who are dying from cancer or AIDS or whatnot."

Hebert said the FDA has approved the use of Mari-

Usage in teens

Mike Harmon, a counselor and licensed social worker, also spoke to the coalition, outlining how teens typically become drug and alcohol users.

He works with many teens and families who are suffering from drug addiction.

"Drugs affect emotional intelligence," Harmon said. "And emotional intelligence is found in the frontal area of the brain."

Brain development continues in a person through the teen years and typically doesn't stop until age 25.

"Drugs make them feel good," Harmon said. "That what drugs are all about - it makes them feel good."

"Positive connections are made in the brain between drugs and good experiences."

Harmon said despite efforts in the past few decades to stop the shipping and sale of drugs, society can't seem to stop the demand.

"You have to address prevention and treatment," Harmon said, "and why people start to begin with. It can happen to anyone."

Harmon urged parents in the audience to teach their children "emotional intelligence" and how to make rational decisions in life.

"Listen to them, teach them things, but don't give advice," he added. "And be a parent, not their friend."