

The Dallas Morning News

Texas' Leading Newspaper

Dallas, Texas, Saturday, January 21, 2006

DallasNews.com

50 cents

Teen drinking is a 'crisis in the making'

By LOIS JORDAN

Let me begin this article on a personal note. My husband, Bill, and I graduated from Highland Park High School in 1968. Our two daughters graduated in 1992 and 1994 from Highland Park. When Brooke was a freshman at Baylor, she attended a funeral of one of her friends. As I sat with her in Saint Michael's and All Angels church, it occurred to me that our daughters had gone to more funerals than my husband and I had at that time. What a wakeup call!

One more time I was convinced that "times are not the same" as when we were in high school. Several things account for that. Kids today are begin-

ning to drink alcohol in junior high much like we may have in high school, and they are drinking in high school much like we may have in college. Not only is their initial usage happening approximately three years earlier, but the type of alcohol is also stronger.

I remember that if we could find a six pack of beer, we thought we had accomplished something. Today, the kids are drinking liquor (shots).

We also may have had alcohol for a special occasion (a dance, graduation, etc.), the kids today are drinking on a regular basis (weekends, weeknights, etc.).

In addition, the world around the kids today is significantly different.

GUEST COLUMN

Our country was attacked Sept. 11, 2001. Chronic diseases such as cancer, leukemia, diabetes, heart attacks and mental illness are everyday occurrences in the lives of our kids. Many kids are growing up in homes where their parents are depressed, unemployed or alcoholic. On the other hand, some are growing up with their parents so active in social activities such as Junior League, tennis, golf or travel that they lack structure and accountability.

I don't wish to come off as blaming, yet having grown up in the Park Cities and having raised two children here, I know what I

am talking about. As parents, we need to examine our attitudes and beliefs about alcohol. It is not just a benign substance to be used for entertainment.

If alcohol were created today, it would have to be studied by the Federal Food and Drug Administration to determine whether it is a food or a drug. Once determined a drug, the FDA would then assign it as a "scheduled drug" by studying what addictive qualities and harm affects it had. For example, heroin is a "schedule I" drug. Alcohol would be a "schedule II" drug.

So here we have a crisis in the making. Toxic substances, a struggling world, physically and emotionally underdeveloped kids, parents overwhelmed and

depressed and we want to call it "partying!" If we can learn to become comfortable in our own skins without mood- or mind-altering substance, then we can support our kids in the same manner.

"Life is difficult," as Scott Peck says in his book *The Road Less Traveled*. Nevertheless, I believe we can learn to live life on life's terms.

We must take an honest and courageous stand on the truth about alcohol use and abuse. Our precious children's lives depend on it.

Lois Jordan is the owner and program director of Solutions Outpatient Services. She is also a Park Cities resident.

A time to be serious

04:49 PM CST on Saturday, January 21, 2006

BY BETHANY ANDERSON / Neighbors Editor

I enjoy getting to celebrate all of Park Cities' happy occasions. There's much to celebrate — and there will be more, I'm certain.

But if you notice, this week's Voices section does take on a more serious subject — teen drinking.

Now, I do know that although there have been recent incidents, by and large teen-drinking arrests are down exponentially in Highland Park. Statistics say Highland Park police issued 58 citations in 2004, compared to the 209 issued in 1998.

And there is also the argument — and rightfully so — that Highland Park teen alcohol arrests are no more plentiful than any other town with teenagers. “You can substitute Irving, Mesquite, Garland, any of those towns, for Highland Park,” one person told me. “As long as there's alcohol and teens, you're going to get a mix of the two at times. The difference is the pocketbook.”

And maybe that is so. But I do know one thing — every time I read of a big “bust” of a party, I'm reminded of my senior year of high school and the gruesome reminder my classmates and I got one night about how nobody — even a high-school senior — is invincible.

I wouldn't call DeDe a good friend of mine, but we knew each other from newspaper and yearbook. I saw her that Friday when we went over layouts for several yearbook pages. She had plans to go with her boyfriend and some friends to a party — our town had plenty of places to party with alcohol in relative obscurity.

I had to work that night; I had a part-time job at an ice cream parlor. Shortly before I closed up, I heard a screech and a crash in the street in front of the store. The police and ambulances came moments later.

The accident was bad. The usual menagerie of gawkers stood nearby; I remember one of them saying that the “girl looked real bad.”

It wasn't until the news that night that I found out it was a student at my high school. It wasn't until Sunday morning that I knew it was DeDe and that alcohol was a factor in the accident that threw her out of the truck, headfirst into the concrete and brick sign in the church lawn she landed in.

DeDe never graduated from high school or college. She'll never get married. She'll never have

babies or grandbabies. There are a whole lot of things she'll never get to do and a very short list of things she did get to do.

And “drink alcohol” is on that list. I'm not sure anyone could argue that the tradeoff was worth it.

Several Park Cities organizations have banded together to host author Koren Zailckas, who wrote *Smashed*, a chronicle of her struggles with drinking – a struggle that began as a teen and shaped the way she interacts with people to this day. Zailckas will be speaking at 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 13, at Highland Park High School. The speech is co-sponsored by the Highland Park Independent School District, Park Cities Chemical Awareness Council and Highland Park United Methodist Church.

This week, we spoke with Zailckas and heard what she had to say about her struggles and how to address the issue. Also, Lois Jordan, who both lives in Park Cities and whose children attended Highland Park High School, weighs in on why it's an issue, and what parents can do. Jordan not only speaks from first-hand experience as a parent, but also as someone who deals with substance abuse on a daily basis. She is the owner and program director for Solutions Outpatient Services.