Letter: RHS Junior Urges A Closer Look at Underage Drinking

Township teen and new member on the Municipal Alliance calls for community to join the alliance in combating a persistent problem.

December 8, 2010

Editor's note: Caitlin Murphy is a junior at Ridge High School and a member of the Bernards Township Municipal Alliance Against Substance Abuse.

To the Editor,

As a resident of Bernards Township for the past seventeen years, as well as a teenager, I can relate to the struggles that teens face when it comes to underage drinking. I understand the busy lives of our teens, and along with the Bernards Township Municipal Alliance, I felt that action had to be taken. "It's 21 for a Reason" is a great way to get the message across to both teens and parents.

I am fortunate enough to be a newly appointed youth member of the Municipal Alliance, and I will strive to make an impact on this issue.

On October 28, the Bernards Township Municipal Alliance Against Substance Abuse kicked off the "It's 21 For A Reason" campaign with a performance by comedian Matt Bellace, PhD. The Alliance aims to provide consultation, programs, training, and resources to the Bernards Township community with the goal of preventing and reducing the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Dr. Bellace's approach, along with the Alliance's, is refreshing, and one the township desperately needs.

It is reported that the average age in which Bernards Township youth begin to consume alcohol is 14, and the statistics for consumption only grow as the age progresses, with nearly 65% of Bernard's Township 12th graders reporting to have consumed alcohol in the last month.

Drinking alcohol during these crucial years of development can have substantial impacts on the brain as well as the body; restricting activity on the areas of the brain that are crucial in forming memories and making good judgments as well as hindering athletic ability. As The American Athletic Institute reported, just one night of heavy drinking can set an athlete back two weeks of training.
Underage drinking has become a significant problem in the area, requiring swift action for the safety and well being of our youth, physically and mentally. Dr. Bellace's attitude towards taking action is quite unique. He does not intend to scare or intimidate students into abstaining from alcohol and other drugs. Rather, he objectively presents information and suggests that teens achieve "natural highs" instead. He understands the pressure that teens face, particularly the competition that affects so many youth in Bernards Township. Despite his extensive background in clinical neuropsychology, he makes a simple and concise point through humor: you can have fun and still be substance free. This message is what our teens need to hear, and Dr. Bellace, as well as the Alliance, is committed to spreading it.

I encourage both teens and their parents to visit the newly redesigned Municipal Alliance website for further information on "It's 21 for a Reason" and other Alliance efforts.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Murphy

Cross Road

Basking Ridge