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Working together, we can reduce drunken driving

Albert Angelo
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We in the Coachella Valley enjoy breathtaking scenery, warm winters and year-round recreation. Yet, within such natural beauty lies a serious health threat and it's in the form of alcohol abuse.

The statistics related to alcohol abuse in the Coachella Valley are disturbing.

In 2012 alone, more than 2,230 driving under the influence (DUI) cases were received by local law enforcement officials. Data compiled by the Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC) reveal:

1. Coachella Valley has a higher prevalence of residents (21.3 percent) who binge drink (consuming four or five beverages at one time) than the national average (16.9 percent).
2. More than 21 percent of adults who consumed alcoholic beverages engaged in binge drinking within the past 30 days of the 2010 survey.
3. In 2010, more than 5,200 residents drove after having too much to drink within the past 30 days of the survey.
4. The percentage of Coachella Valley residents drinking 4-6 drinks per drinking day increased from 7 percent in 2007 to 8 percent in 2010.
5. In 2007, more than 31 percent of Coachella Valley parents or guardians of children age 6 to 17 reported not discussing with their children in the past year information about alcohol use and abuse. In 2010, that number jumped to more than 42 percent.

With such statistics what can be done to combat alcohol abuse? Thankfully, efforts targeting drinking and driving are being enacted. Sobriety checkpoints and the recent Shut Down Drunk Driving event held in November in response to the death of a 25-year-old woman in Coachella demonstrate our community's commitment to confront this problem. Yet, more must be done. Specifically, more must happen to address alcohol abuse long before an intoxicated driver starts a car.

Recently, the Substance Abuse Advisory Committee was convened to address not only drunken driving but further "upstream" factors that contribute to the misuse and abuse of alcohol and other substances.

Hosted by the CSU San Bernardino Palm Desert campus and composed of community health leaders, this committee will work in partnership with the Clinton Health Matters Initiative and collaborate with the Coachella Valley Association of Governments and community organizations including Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Shut Down Drunk Driving to create and implement a wide range of effective and comprehensive health and wellness programs.

The committee also will examine the most effective strategies to augment and strengthen existing prevention education efforts.

As outlined in the Health Matters Coachella Valley Blueprint for Action, by 2018 we hope to report measurable progress in addressing current substance abuse issues and challenges that affect our community.

We know our goals are ambitious and our challenges are great. Success will require members of our

community coming together and working collaboratively sharing ideas, offering resources and developing programs.

As the chairman of this committee, I personally invite you to participate. To learn more about how you can become involved, contact me, Albert Angelo, at aangelo@csusb.edu or at (909) 537-3281. Together we can build a stronger community working to make our citizens healthier and our streets safer.

Let's make 2014 a happy year for us all!

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