

SCHOOL NEWS

DWI program brings tears, ovation at Raton High

By TIM KELLER
The Chronicle-News

The silver Honda Odyssey left the Albuquerque soccer tournament late that Saturday, Nov. 11, 2006, to carry the family of six home to Las Vegas, NM, in time for Sunday morning church services and Monday's school day. After a dinner stop for Chinese food in Santa Fe, the family got back on I-25 northbound for

a blood alcohol level four times the legal limit. When he realized he'd driven 10 miles past the turnoff to his Tesuque home, he turned around and drove back, at 90 mph, in the same northbound lane that had brought him this far.

When his new white 3/4-ton pickup plowed into the silver Honda Odyssey, it hit so squarely that both vehicles came to stop right there, nose to nose, despite



Photos by Tim Keller

Ray Collins, left, shared his family's tragic story with students at Raton High School last Friday. During the talk, he displayed this poster-size photo of the wreck that killed five members of his family.



the last leg of the drive home.

Meanwhile, another driver left Albuquerque. With four DWI convictions, he was a "functional drunk" with a developed tolerance for alcohol that enabled him to make it all the way past Santa Fe with

their combined speeds of 165 mph.

When Ray Collins' phone rang in Las Vegas, he learned that he'd lost his daughter, son-in-law, and three granddaughters. Miraculously, a fourth granddaughter survived

the crash. The rest of his family - like the drunk driver - was dead.

Last week, for the first time since that horrible night, Collins shared his story with an audience. "You are the first group that I've talked to," he told the rapt audience Friday morning at Raton High School. "I've refused every other request...because I wasn't strong enough."

Collins has been working with New Mexico legislators to strengthen the state's DWI laws. He decided, in the hospital after the accident, that he had to do something - to act, to save lives. "That's why I'm here," he told his Raton audience, "I'm here to save your lives."

"Our culture includes alcohol in all important occasions - birthdays, graduations, weddings," Collins

said. "We inherited this from our parents' generation. We can change it for our children's generation. You need to break this chain."

"If you're going to drink alcohol, there's a time and a place for that. That time, that place, is not behind the wheel of a vehicle."

He cited statistics - the cost of alcohol abuse in New Mexico in 2006 was \$2.5 billion, or \$1,250 per citizen - but most of his appeal was far more personal.

Collins told stories and displayed pictures of each of the family members he lost that night.

Granddaughter Selena was gifted in math, a fourth-grader, she wanted to become a doctor. Fifth-grader Jacqueline loved food, sports, people, and animals; she hoped to

become a veterinarian. Collins' oldest granddaughter, Alisha, was a high school senior with her college acceptance letter already in hand; shy and quiet, she loved fish and volleyball and basketball.

The girls' mother, and Collins' daughter, was Renee, a nurse who worked in the hospital and the schools; she was about to earn an advanced degree she'd pursued for 10 years. Her husband, Paul, provided home health care services for the disabled; he and Renee planned to start their own health care service.

Fighting back tears, Collins said, "All five of these people were murdered. This was no accident: my family was murdered."

Collins' appearance was sponsored by the Colfax County DWI Program and

Magistrate Judge Warren Walton. Walton phoned the Chronicle-News reporter hours after the program to add one more piece of information, which he said Collins had not been able to share. "Ray's granddaughter Arissa survived the crash. She was 15. Two years later she wanted to go off to college and room with a girlfriend. Ray begged her to stay, saying he wasn't ready to see her go. She stayed, and she was killed. Guess how?"

Walton said a drunk driver killed Arissa.

When the assembly ended Friday morning, Ray Collins sat down. Immediately, every one of the 400 people in the room stood up, giving Collins a standing ovation even as tears rolled down their faces.

Columbian Card Factory celebrates 10th year

By TIM KELLER
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RATON - Raton's Columbian Elementary School is celebrating the 10th year of its popular Columbian Card Factory, a greeting card company begun in 2001 by retired teacher Pat Veltri through a School-to-Work Grant.

Students take orders for packs of six cards, sold for \$5 per pack, then set up production lines to make the cards and fill the orders. Each student-designed card is handmade. Money earned by the card factory is devoted to buying supplies and books.

The card factory was developed to give students opportunities to fill out real job applications, be interviewed for real card factory jobs, participate in the actual



Taityn Valdez and Tobias Tapia-Muniz work the greeting card production line.



Photos courtesy of Columbian Elementary School

Alexia Romero and Hollie Wood consider the red greeting card they've just made.

meets with all the students before the card factory application process begins. She teaches students how to complete a successful job application and how to dress and act for a job interview. She goes over the duties of each card factory position with the students.

The card factory then "hires" workers to fill its many positions, including manager, advertising, design, production, stocking, quality control, sales, and custodian.

Block prints are designed by students, then produced during special card factory workdays. Once the cards are printed, they are hung in the school's hallways to dry. After drying, cards are stamped with the Columbian Card Factory logo, then packaged and organized for distribution.

Over the years, the factory has expanded its production to include cards with paints, watercolor, and other media. In order to reduce waste, cards that have been rejected are recycled, placed on the die-cut machine to create new shapes and glued onto blank cards.

As this year's card sales wind down, it's still possible to place late orders by calling Columbian Elementary School at (575) 445-9851.

Susie Quintana, area director for the Department of Workforce Solutions,

operation of a business, and take on responsibilities of the card factory jobs.

Honor Society



Hoehne High School inducts nine new National Honor Society members

On March 17, nine new members were inducted into the Hoehne National Honor Society Chapter. These students have worked hard to maintain a 3.5 grade point average and displayed the four characteristics of scholarship, service, leadership and character. Top row from left are Rachel Valencich, Taylor Hiss, Mac Turner, Christiano Marquez, David Hart and Mariah Garlutz. In front from left are Alex Maes, Garrett Schrepfer and Anna Nelson. In the bottom photo are all the members of the 2009-10 Hoehne National Honor Society Chapter.



Photos courtesy of Hoehne High School