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Mt. Abe to Host Personal Safety Fair for Students May 5

Collaborative Community Project Brings VT Organizations to High School Campus

BRISTOL: On Friday, May 5 Mt. Abraham Union High School will host workshops and presentations by numerous organizations, creating a day-long, campus-wide event with a 'personal safety' theme for students. The fair, developed by faculty and students in partnership with the Youth Safety Council of Vermont and with support from Co-operative Insurance Companies, will showcase safety knowledge from across Vermont.

The risk of motor vehicle crashes is higher among 16-19-year-olds than among any other age group. Per mile driven, teen drivers ages 16 to 19 are nearly three times more likely than drivers aged 20 and older to be in a fatal crash.¹ The safety fair is meant to have a positive impact on Mt. Abraham's student drivers, so they might choose to drive thoughtfully for their own benefit and the safety of others. A mock crash will be the central educational experience of the fair, presented by students in the Mt. Abraham Vermont Teen Leadership Safety Program (VTLSP) in conjunction with Bristol Fire, Police and Rescue Departments. A scripted, simulated crash will reveal the potentially tragic outcomes of distracted driving, wearing no seat belt, and bad decision-making. Mock crashes are dramatic educational tools that complement consistent messaging and prevention programs.

Participants in the fair include Barrett's Trucking, who will bring a 'big rig' to help young drivers experience the blind spots that the drivers of large trucks face. The Vermont State Police will present forensic crash reconstruction techniques. Motorcycle safety will be addressed by Ride Safe VT, and Sharon Huntley will speak about the tragic loss of her teen son, Spencer, in a distraction-related crash. The Youth Safety Council will present 'Turn Off Texting,' with students driving a golf cart while texting to learn first-hand how dangerous distracted driving can be, and AT&T will be there with their It Can Wait campaign, talking about the dangers of texting while driving. Teen race car driver Evan Hallstrom will be on hand to talk about the importance of safety belts. Many other organizations including the Vermont Department of Health, UVM Medical Center, Alive At 25, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, AAA Northern New England, WomenSafe, FireProTec, Middlebury College, Heritage Toyota and Ford, Bristol Rescue, Bristol Police, TextLess LiveMore and other community volunteers will be on campus to present information and interact with students. In addition to the VTLSP student group, students in the Mt Abraham senior civics class have stepped forward to help plan and implement the event, taking positive civic action in their school community.

Mt. Abraham principal Jessica Barewicz said, "An amazing team of teachers, students, and community members are thoughtfully planning a meaningful experience for all at the Safety Fair. They know that as school community we need to understand that the concept of safety needs to be taken in many directions. Without a safe educational and living environment humans can't learn and thrive. I'm so grateful for the work they are doing to engage the whole community in a conversation about safety."

With the assistance of Heritage Ford, faculty, students and volunteers will help document the event to create an online reference guide, building on the work of the Youth Safety Council to publish a directory of free safety programming available to Vermont schools, yscvt.wordpress.com. The new guide will help other Vermont high schools produce similar safety fairs with confidence and easy access to many freely available programs.

Sharon Koller, Student Assistance Program Counselor at Mt. Abraham and advisor to the student "VTLSP" club, facilitated the event planning. She said, "Our school is committed to preparing students to make decisions that have positive consequences for themselves and others. This Safety Fair expands on that commitment, giving students even more insight and information to help them independently be safer on the roads and in their daily lives."

James Lockridge, Executive Director of the Youth Safety Council of Vermont, said, "Vermont can look to the people of Bristol and our safety community across the state for a model of collaboration. This project exemplifies the vision of the Vermont Highway Safety Alliance which inspired this safety fair effort." The VHSA is a non-profit organization that brings together highway safety stakeholders from all over Vermont, including state agencies and law enforcement as well as federal partners, insurance companies, and nonprofit organizations, vermonthighwaysafety.org

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About Mt. Abraham Union High School: Mt. Abraham is a Grades 7-12 public middle/high school in the village of Bristol, serving the Five Town district of Bristol, Lincoln, Monkton, New Haven, and Starksboro. Mt. Abraham is part of the Addison Northeast Supervisory Union (ANESU) and works to create and maintain a stimulating and

respectful environment in which all are engaged, all pursue and promote learning, and all participate as active, responsible citizens. <http://www.mtabevt.org/>

About the Youth Safety Council of VT: The YSCVT uses golf carts and an advanced driving simulator to demonstrate the dangers of distraction to Vermont's student drivers. With support from the Governor's Highway Safety Program and sponsors, the 'Turn Off Texting' program is free to high schools and community groups statewide. yscvt.org

1. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). Fatality facts: teenagers 2014. Arlington (VA): The Institute; 2014 [cited 2016 Sept 20]. <http://www.iihs.org/iihs/topics/t/teenagers/fatalityfacts/teenagers>

Photo: Faculty, students, and community members plan the Mt. Abraham safety fair. Clockwise from left:: Sharon Koller, Student Assistance Program Counselor; Kevin Masse, Driver Educator; James Lockridge, Executive Director, Youth Safety Council of Vermont; Anne Friedrichs, Social Studies Teacher; Siena Hoaglund and Satinder Pabla, students. Photo courtesy Youth Safety Council of Vermont. Full resolution file available at http://www.yscvt.dreamhosters.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Safety_Fair_Planning-FULLRESOLUTION.jpg

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