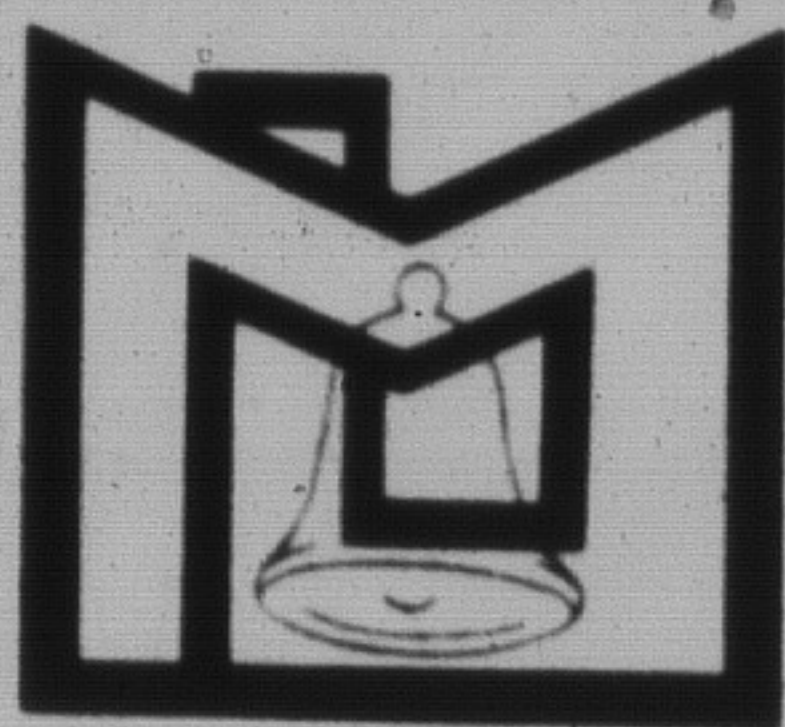


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Maplehurst inmates taking drinking-and-driving program

By LISA TALLYN

It seems highly unlikely a group of Maplehurst inmates would voluntarily get together for two hours on Tuesday nights to discuss the negative aspects of drinking and driving, but many of them are doing just that.

The inmates are participants in the Impaired Drivers Education program offered at Maplehurst. The program is led by volunteers from the community and designed to raise the awareness of the inmates on the effects of drinking and driving.

"Many of the men in the groups do have charges related to impaired driving," said Pam Skinner, volunteer co-ordinator at Maplehurst, "but others don't. Some take it for their own interest."

She said some inmates take the course just to relax, and get away from the living unit, but adds all participants come away from the program with some new knowledge.

The inmates in the program, the groups are usually no larger than 12, sign a contract on the first night confirming their participation in the program over the next seven weeks. They are assigned homework, and have tests to complete.

The community volunteers are largely responsible for the success of the program which was first offered at Maplehurst in 1984. There was a lapse in the sessions in late 1986 and early 1987 due to lack of community volunteers, but the program has been in full swing since then.

"The sessions take the hard edge off of being incarcerated. It gives the men an opportunity to see just what it's like to be living the straight



Pam Skinner

life. Most of them are surprised to find that people care enough about them to volunteer their time," said Ms Skinner.

In the introductory session, participants take a test which grades their knowledge on the subject of alcohol. Ms Skinner says most of the men are surprised by what they don't know.

"We try to dispell some of the myths surrounding the subject, and get them to stop and think."

In the second session, the community volunteer leads a discussion which answers the questions: how long should you wait after one drink before driving?; does eating or drinking coffee make a difference?; which contains more alcohol, beer, wine or whiskey?; and, what percentage of driving deaths involve alcohol?

Carol Stoveken, who operates a private program offered in the community for convicted impaired drivers, speaks to the participants about alcohol and drugs.

"The men listen to what Carol has to say because she knows what she's

talking about. She talks about the effects of mixing the two, because in reality that often happens."

Films are shown in most of the sessions which deal with the subject including *Collision Course* which takes a driver through the steps of impairment.

Guest speakers are invited to attend. Scheduled to talk during the next program are Coroner Dr. I.A. Hunter, and Peter Marks from the Addiction Research Foundation.

Mr. Marks talks to the group about treatment programs available on the street.

Ms Skinner says it's difficult to rate the success of the program, but adds that each participant comes away with something.

"For many of the men, drinking is a major social activity, a common pastime. They all seem to think of themselves as social drinkers, and we talk about that, when does drinking become a problem, when do they cross the line and become problem drinkers?"

"Some of the men in the program are desperate to change, and we are there to help them make that change. It's a question of timing. Others won't get as much from the program because of their age or bravado."

Ms Skinner is currently looking for volunteers from the community to participate in the Impaired Drivers Education Program at Maplehurst. The volunteers don't have to meet any specific qualifications but must realize they will be working with a group of men aged between 20 and 30.

"The level of interest is most important," said Ms Skinner. Instructional material and training will be provided. New volunteers who start before Feb. 23 will be able to sit through the seven-week session as their training.

Anyone interested should contact Ms Skinner at 878-8141.

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