

Students hear hard truths about alcohol

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Correspondent

Serge Leclerc has a list of credentials that would make him a hot item at any gathering of social activists concerned with issues like violence against women, teenage suicide, and alcohol abuse.

A social worker and counsellor from the Waterloo area, he has been a guest lecturer at various universities and has appeared on numerous TV and radio programs.

Leclerc also practices what he preaches. He is a founder, director, and board member of a host of community action groups.

But what had the student body of Stouffville District Secondary School entranced this past Monday morning was Leclerc's in-your-face candour, his direct hits aimed at the values they espouse, and his own experiences as a drug-wasted, time-serving street kid.

For what Leclerc did during his hour-long admonition was to give the kids a wake-up call. And he was up front about it.

He said from the outset he really didn't care if the students liked what he was about to say to them.

He started out by telling the teens they were members of the most intelligent generation ever.

The only problem, he added, was that they were also the most destructive generation in history in terms of teen suicides.

He continued to say that the current crop of teens is

the most informed compared to any other batch in history but they are also the most misinformed when it comes to the constant barrage of lifestyle myths being foisted upon them by the media.

Strutting back and forth across the stage as he spoke, Leclerc came right out and insisted the kids were being led around with a silver ring in their nose.

They have bought into the big lie foisted upon them by 30 second TV ads portraying alcohol as the secret to all life's pleasures, and sweat-shirts as the ticket to peer acceptance.

The secret to successful TV, he advised, was to forget about any undesirable impact a show might have on the values of the prime teen market.

"They just care about ratings," he scoffed. "It all comes down to how much they can get for a 30 second ad."

As for booze ads glorifying the party lifestyle, he said the campaign has been an enormous success.

Alcohol-related deaths are at an all time high among teens.

Fetal alcohol syndrome is now the third leading cause of birth defects in this country, he went on. Alcohol-related problems are 3,500 times more prevalent among teens than those resulting from smoking.

Yet when he joined a group of lobbyists trying to persuade Ottawa to put warning labels on alcohol products, the initiative was shot down.

He hit the boys with the results of a recent survey which found they drink simply because they are expected to.

They'll be called a wimp or a geek if they don't. The real wimps and geeks, he insisted, are the ones that let others call the shots for them.

As for the girls, the survey said they drink because their boyfriends do, and because they felt it lets their "real self" come out.

"If that's your real self," Leclerc roared, "then you better keep it inside!"

"Do you girls really think you'll have a wild time up there on the roof top because you're drinking? Remember the little silver ring in the nose? It's working."

Leclerc mocked those who

present the false lifestyle ads to young people, declaring they wouldn't dare offer the truth.

"Why don't they show a commercial where a teenaged boy wraps a garden-hose around his neck and hangs himself in the garage because of alcohol. Or follow a girl around for awhile after she's been date raped at a drunken party. Heaven forbid they would ever tell you the truth!"

Leclerc left the teens with the reminder that they were free to make their own choices.

And if the intentness of the expressions on their faces was any indication, they were going to give the whole thing some deep consideration.

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