

Simulators show Clinton Twp. students what it's like to drive under the influence of pot, alcohol



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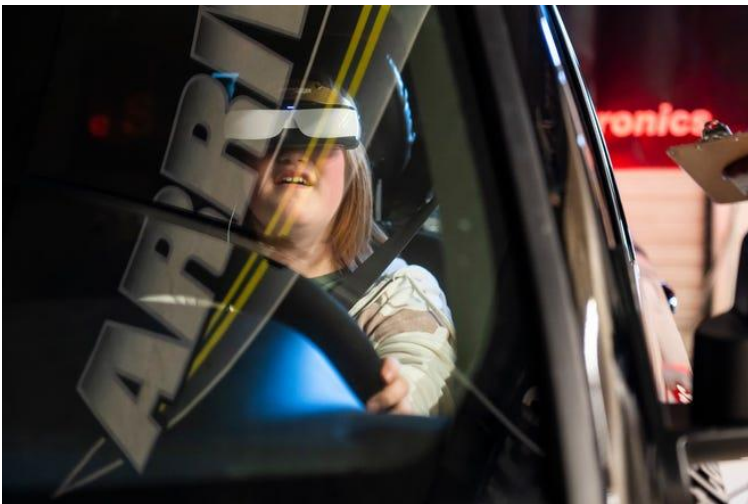
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Young drivers in Clinton Township got behind the wheel on Saturday to try out a cannabis driving simulator at Chippewa Valley High School.

It was an experience 14-year-old Makayla White, a first-year student at the school set to begin driving lessons in just two weeks, said she won't forget.

"I felt like that's a very terrifying experience," White said after exiting the simulator car. "I'll never drink and drive."



Lydia Berent, 13, tries an impaired driving simulator provided by the Arrive Alive Tour during the Safe Drive Family Fair event on Saturday, March 16, 2024 at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. Katy Kildee, The Detroit News

Educators had that lesson in mind when they set up the black SUV at CVHS on Saturday morning, said Shaquille Hill, a traveling educator with UNITE's Arrive Alive Tour.

Wellness organization UNITE's simulator team has visited multiple states since launching its Arrive Alive Tour, which uses virtual reality to simulate distracted, drunk or drugged driving in a safe environment, Hill said.

“It’s been really amazing to be ... able to educate and give awareness to students all over the world, to make a smarter decision when it comes to driving under the influence,” he said.



Lydia Berent, 13, tries an impaired driving simulator provided by the Arrive Alive Tour while her family, from left, Jamie Berent, Elaina Berent, 9, and Ethan Berent, 13, watch during the Safe Drive Family Fair event on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. Katy Kildee, The Detroit News

At CVHS, teens had the opportunity to get in the simulator car's driver seat, donning virtual reality goggles to see what it would be like to steer while under the influence of cannabis.

Like other teens throughout the day, White didn't make it far down the virtual road before crashing into another car or building.

An avid player of other video games, White said she felt the simulator was a helpful, accessible way to show young people what it's like to drive under the influence.

"You don't know what can happen, so it's better for preparing kids," she said.



Chippewa Valley High School senior Tyra Burks, 18, a member of the Coalition Teen Council, tries an impaired driving simulator provided by the Arrive Alive Tour during the Safe Drive Family Fair event on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. Katy Kildee, The Detroit News

Students with the school's Coalition Teen Council organized Saturday's Safe Drive Fair with the intention of spreading awareness about the dangers of driving under the influence, said Virginia Adams, a student assistance specialist and advisor for the coalition teen council.

Farm Bureau Insurance owner Sue Abro said she sponsored the tour's stop in Clinton Township to inform students and their families about the potential financial costs behind a charge for driving under the influence.

Drivers of any age could lose their insurance carriers entirely with some DUI charges, leaving some people with no choice but to pay triple rates through a high-risk carrier, Abro said.

It's a lesson Abro reminds her nieces and nephews of often, she said.

"A lot of them aren't aware that under 21 is zero-tolerance, versus .08 (blood alcohol content) for a 21-year-old," said Detective Dave Decker, a Clinton Township Police school resource officer at the fair.



Chippewa Valley High School freshman Rhyle Buchanan, 15, tries to shoot a basketball while wearing "drunk goggles" during the Safe Drive Family Fair event on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. Katy Kildee, The Detroit News

Saturday's fair also included carnival games including bowling, basketball and putt-putt all with one twist: Participants had to wear alcohol impairment goggles to experience each motion as if they were under the influence.

"I never realized how severe it was to be driving like that," Ariana Heigh, a 16-year-old CVHS student told The News after failing to catch different items in front of her with the goggles on.

As a new driver on the road, Heigh said she felt it was more important than ever to remain cautious and watch out for reckless drivers.



Stella Volpe, 14, tries an impaired driving simulator with guidance from Kayla Thomas-Wright, program manager of Strive 4 a Safer Drive, center, during the Safe Drive Family Fair event on Saturday, March 16, 2024, at Chippewa Valley High School in Clinton Township. Katy Kildee, The Detroit News

Janis Meyerhoff, a Clinton Township mother of five, said she'd been dreading the moment her kids would start driving since they were babies.

Two of her children who attend CVHS will start learning to drive before the end of the year, a process Meyerhoff said she is trying to stay optimistic about.

"There's always that worry about other people on the road," said Meyerhoff, who is 39.

"Unfortunately, you can't change that, but prepare them for the possibility of something else."