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Texting and Driving Not Just a Teen Issue

By Laurie Snyder

"Sending or reading a text takes your eyes off the road for 5 seconds. At 55 mph, that's like driving the length of an entire football field, blindfolded." - National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
The danger of distracted driving became all too clear one day in April 2014 when an Orinda father of two young children was seriously injured by a car driven by a local teen. The teen, also an Orindan, was allegedly texting while driving on San Pablo Dam Road near Wagner Ranch Elementary School. The injured man is still working on his recovery.

Viewing that accident as a wake-up call, Orinda Traffic Safety Advisory Committee members David Libby and Mark Roberts advised the Orinda City Council Feb. 17 that they've been talking with other Orindans about ways to prevent similar accidents from ever happening again.

The end result is "Impact Teen Drivers," an educational event for the entire community that will be held at 7 p.m. March 5 in the Miramonte High School auditorium. Funded by the state's Office of Traffic Safety and the California Highway Patrol, it also has the backing of the California Teachers Association.

"We're really happy to be able to partner with the city on this," says Miramonte High School Principal Julie Parks. Although MHS already has a program that addresses the dangers of drinking and driving, she believes that it isn't comprehensive enough. Texting is so ingrained for so many teens and adults now that not responding to a text message is perceived as a faux pas - a belief that often leads to risky behaviors. In recent studies, 20 to 25 percent of teens admitted that they respond to text messages every time they drive.

"We sent a team of students to watch one of the Impacts events," says Parks. They gave the program solid marks, but felt that adults also really needed to hear the information. So it was changed from a daytime assembly to an evening program for the general public.

"Distracted driving affects everyone - whether you're a driver or not," she observes. "This truly is a community-wide issue."

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