DWI lesson has impact

Students see staged crash

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ZACHARY — Ken Doss told a group of high school students here Tuesday that the night of Nov. 14, 1980, turned from one of the happiest nights of his life to the worst.

Doss' eldest daughter was killed by a drunken driver that night and his story, while common in this country, made an uncommon impression on the bunch of Zachary High School students.

About 300 juniors and seniors listened quietly as Doss pleaded: "Love your family enough not to drink and drive."

On that November night Doss and his wife were following their three daughters home from dinner in Baton Rouge. The girls had plans for the night and he and his wife were going grocery shopping in Zachary. But he wanted to follow them to make sure they made it home safely.

The girls, driving a red Volkswagen, passed their parents on the interstate heading north. "My daughters passed us... smiling and laughing... I thought, I'm the luckiest man on earth."

Then, Doss said, "The greatest night of my life turned into the worst night of my life."

Ken Doss

with broken legs, broken arms... another in the back, blood streaming from her mouth, screaming..."

Then Doss paused. And this high school crowd, which might find almost anything to snicker at any other time, paused, too. There were a few sobs in the audience, perhaps from some who knew the Doss' daughter when she was in school here.

Danita Doss, a 15-year-old sophomore at Zachary High, was pronounced dead at the scene. Another daughter was taken to Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center. She still suffers from a pin in her shoulder.

He said he stayed drunk for the next two years trying to forget that night. He finally quit drinking and now tells his story to others, hoping to prevent, if possible, the same thing from happening to somebody else.

But when the high school students left the auditorium, the lesson wasn't over. Outside two cars apparently had collided head on in front of the auditorium. Paramedics, police cars, ambulances, a fire truck rushed up.

Firemen, using an extraction tool, pulled two young bodies from a smashed Toyota pickup. The sheet-covered forms lay on the ground, yards from where the driver of the blue Cordoba was being read his rights, arrested for driving while intoxicated.

The accident was staged but the impression it made on the students was very real. And cars passing by on La. 64 slowed down and stared just as if the two vehicles actually had smashed head on.

When the hearse drove off with two full body bags, some students grinned nervously, some shifted from foot to foot and others held their hands to their faces.

Lance Herrin gets last-minute instructions before he becomes the DWI crash victim in Tuesday's staged collision.

Jerry Boudreaux and set the wheels in motion. The wheels stopped spinning Tuesday morning.

LeBlanc and Butler said the staged accident wouldn't have been possible without the effort of police, fire and EMT personnel.

Doss said he planned to give the students some statistics on drinking and driving during his brief talk. "But I dropped that idea. I didn't think they'd hear that. But kids are sensitive to real feelings," he said.

"They heard what I said. I just hope they heed."