We can make Rhode Island roadways the safest in the nation. That’s the vision embraced by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation’s 2012 Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), which also makes RI one of 25 states to adopt “Toward Zero Deaths (TZD),” a national campaign to eliminate highway fatalities.

Prevention plays a major role in RIDOT’s vision quest. Of the five “emphasis areas” highlighted in the plan, three — alcohol-impaired driving, occupant protection and young drivers — depend on promoting and practicing prevention programs.

“Alcohol-impaired driving crashes resulted in 94 fatalities from 2006 to 2010, which represents nearly 26 percent of all traffic fatalities in RI,” according to the SHSP. The plan calls for strengthening the laws on impaired driving and increasing public awareness of the dangers of drunk driving. To help prevent drunken driving, parents need to speak to their teenagers and college-age youth to drive this point home and those who plan to drink also need to plan transportation before partying.

“Occupant protection” also depends on prevention. SHSP reports 161 unbelted fatalities and 717 unbelted serious injuries between 2006 and 2012, which accounted for 44 percent of all the traffic fatalities and 21 percent of serious injuries throughout the State. Another simple prevention fix: Buckle up and insist that your newly licensed youth do the same — and insist their passengers do too before a key is turned.

DOT’s plan also focuses on young drivers. Between 2006 and 2010, crashes involving young drivers resulted in 82 fatalities and 883 serious injuries or 26 percent of the total fatalities and serious injuries in RI. Parents need to be more aware of RI laws regarding provisional drivers’ licenses for their children, which among other prohibitions allows for no more than one passenger younger than 21, excluding immediate family members.

Learning to drive is hard enough but when you add too many passengers, incoming text messages and blasting music, there is too much room for error. Start by having only one friend a passenger, not the whole team!

I had lunch recently with Chamber of Commerce President Deb Kelso and we were talking about the NPP Facebook page. Deb suggested that NPP launch “Scene in Narragansett” to encourage more NPP followers on Facebook. Great idea!

So, we kicked it off last month. It features pictures of community members along with a prevention message. If you haven’t seen Marcus Schroeter, NHS teacher “dressed up” for Spirit Week or friendly Steve Reid from our local Stop & Shop, it may be worth a visit to NPP’s Facebook page. And while you’re there, please “like” us, so you can get up-to-date substance abuse prevention info in your News Feeds.

NPP is also initiating a new program in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce. We are excited to reach out to more business partners to help us spread our prevention mission. When the community comes together in a comprehensive way, we can be more effective in reducing substance abuse. ndevaney@narragansettprevention.org.
NCY2012 Shines Despite Rain

Narragansett Celebrates Youth on September 30th turned out to be great fun, despite the early rain. Plenty of chowder, great art activities with Sue Pezza and her husband, and youth talent competitions kept folks entertained! By day’s end, the sun was shining and a line had formed at the dunk tank.

Barbara Morse Silva of NBC 10 joined Senator Jim Sheehan (D - District 36) and Craig Stenning, director of the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals, as celebrity judges for the “Chowda’ Contest.” They named Amalfi Oceanside the winner. The People’s Choice award went to Riptides.

Samantha Comparone, NHS senior and former talent winner, was the mistress of ceremonies for the two talent contests. Winner of Pier Middle School’s ‘Gansett’s Got Talent was Brett Doubrava, followed by Damon Aldrich, Madison Coli, and Anna Hurwitz, respectively. A duet by Dylan D’Aguano and Rachel Sylvia placed second to a solo by Dylan Cataldo who captured first place with an original song in NHS’s ‘Gansett Idol’ contest.

Contest talent judges were Ann Masterson, Greg Page and Cathy Andreozzi. Ms. Andreozzi of the Tori Lyn Andreozzi Foundation also generously donated the prize money for the contest winners.

Prevention TIPS

NPP continues to be concerned about prescription drug abuse among our teens. Even though our recent survey showed a marked reduction in use rates from 2011 to 2012 (12.4% to 6.7%), anecdotal evidence indicates that our teens are still misusing prescriptions and over-the-counter medicine.

According to Drugfree.org, “New research reveals that Americans drastically underestimate the negative impact that the abuse of prescription drugs and OTC cough medicine is having on teens today. Unfortunately, right now, all the elements are aligned for a ‘perfect storm’ to continue threatening the health and well-being of our kids.”

Teen medicine abuse has become a pervasive and devastating problem, with one in six teens admitting to using a prescription drug to get high or change their mood.

2011 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study, sponsored by MetLife Foundation

One key deterrent: Lock up your medicines. Most teens who report medicine abuse say they get those medications from their family or friends. You can purchase a lock box at your local pharmacy or online to keep medicine out of the hands of your children and your children’s friends.

For more information about teen abuse of prescription drugs, visit the website of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. For parents, here’s a suggestion: “Schedule” a 30-minute appointment with your busy teen to spend time together reviewing NIDA for Teens: The Science Behind Drug Abuse. Exchange (Don’t lecture!) ideas, perceptions, feelings about the information you’ll find there, but make clear your disapproval of abusing drugs. More than quality time with your kids, both of you may learn something that will save a life.

Learn more about NPP at narragansettprevention.org or follow us on Facebook.