

Programs aim to keep students' feet on the ground

By Sean McNamara
Freelance writer

ROCHESTER — High school students are faced with many decisions, but possibly the most difficult dilemma they face is whether to use illicit substances.

For some students, the choice will be an equation that includes using substances as a way to "fit in," as a way of coping or getting a thrill. It is an equation that nearly always leads to a negative result.

For other teens, however, "just say no" is more than just a catch phrase. Patrick Plumeri, 18, is part of the Rochester Police Department's DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program, which encourages young students to stay away from drugs and alcohol.

He often speaks to fifth graders about why he has never tried illicit drugs.

"I tell them they don't need drugs for confidence. I know I have control of my life without using drugs," Plumeri said. He explained that self reliance is the key to his decision not to use drugs.

"You don't need to rely on anything else. When you rely on something you need to have, something is wrong," Plumeri said.

According to Edward Ranalli, a member of Aquinas Institute's Student Assistance Program, teens who decide against using drugs tend to have good self esteem, "a sense of who they are and where they are going" and "are not afraid to make mistakes."

Aquinas offers a Concerned Persons group to help students work on their self esteem and self value, Ranalli said. He added that students and faculty members in the group meet once a week for half a year to help students "become more in touch

with themselves" and to possibly help them deal with their own drug use or that of a friend or family member.

For students who choose to use drugs, recovery is extremely difficult, Ranalli said. Many started to use drugs as early as elementary or junior high school and it is difficult for them to quit because the reasons they got into drugs do not go away.

The rate of recurrence for teens is high, Ranalli said, adding that many go through two or three treatment programs before they are able to end their addiction.

Ranalli explained that in order for someone to recover from an addiction, the person has to hit "rock bottom" — the point where the addiction and its consequences can't get any worse.

For teens, hitting bottom may come when either their family or school will not let the abuse continue. Most often, it takes the form of an "intervention," where the teen is confronted with his addiction and receives an offer for help.

While helping current users recover is important, many experts believe preventive education is even more important. Project Intervention, which is based in Henrietta, trains adults to teach substance abuse prevention programs.

Laura Klochko, executive director of Project Intervention, said some of the most effective preventive programs are comprehensive and send consistent messages to teens. They promote the idea of "wellness as a society, a school system and as an individual," Klochko said.

She said that one of the difficulties in drug education is the inconsistent messages teens receive about substance use. While they are admonished on television with

messages to "just say no" or that drugs will "fry their brain like an egg," teens also see drug and alcohol use in the programs they watch and by the sports and entertainment stars whom they idolize.

"We've got to maintain a consistent message of non-use and have positive role models," Klochko said.

Plumeri feels the anti-drug messages he has been exposed to have had an effect on his decision to stay away from drugs. He said that seeing the possible effects of substance abuse have made him afraid of drugs. He has used what he has learned to

reject offers of drugs. At a recent party, Plumeri said he was offered marijuana. His response was a sarcastic "No, I'm trying to give it up."

"People should know by the way you carry yourself that you don't use drugs," Plumeri said. He added that his response was the best to "dodge the situation."

Plumeri said that while saying no may be difficult, teens should realize that they will earn respect if they do.

"Anyone who doesn't respect you for doing what you feel is right, isn't worth being your friend," he explained.

Bishop Kearney

What will happen in the 1990s?

JIM IVES, freshman:

I think that a major event that's going to take place in the future is a change in the way we live. All our cars will change in shape, our clothes will change in style and our houses will also become different in shape and sizes.



AS TEENS SEE IT

BRIDGET DILLON, sophomore:

An incident that will take place in the 1990s will be that they will find a cure for AIDS.



KARI MOYNIHAN, sophomore:

In the 1990s, I think that the governmental agencies will advance in their efforts to control the drug situation and hopefully come to a solution that will end most drug traffic that is going on now.



JON HAND, senior:

In the 1990s, I think that steps will be taken to increase disarmament of nuclear weapons throughout the world.

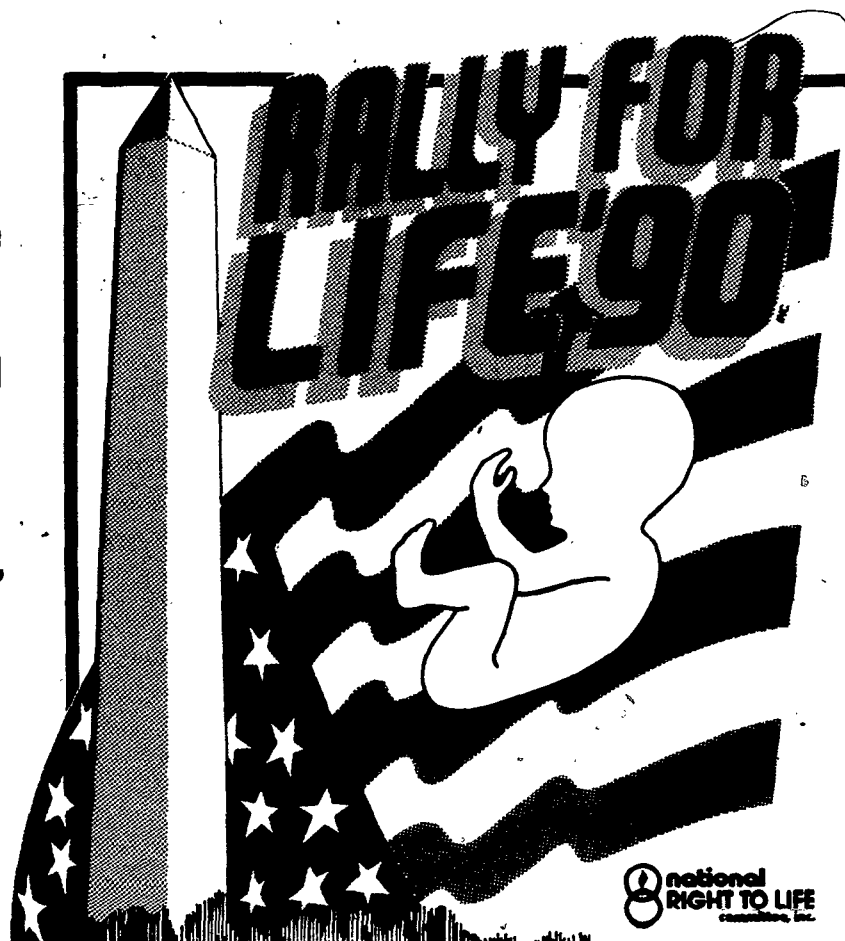


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