

## Thein: Team DUI closes school year with appreciation

Contributed by Judy Thein  
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It is the peak of the commencement season which signifies the close of the school year. Team DUI would like to thank Lake County educators for their support in allowing us the opportunity to foster working partnerships with Lake County school districts, working together to help keep our youth and others safe.

Underage drinking is a serious problem in our nation. Alcohol is the drug of choice for youth and the leading cause of death among teenagers. Alcohol is involved in the deaths of more teens than any other illicit drugs combined. Each year 2,300 teens die due to alcohol. Youth begin drinking on an average of 13 years of age or under. One-third of all sixth graders get alcohol from home. Thirty-six percent of seventh graders receive care for alcohol-related problems.

Team DUI was formed to focus on underage drinking, educating our youth on the realities of drinking and driving in order to prevent one more senseless death or injury.

It takes a herculean effort of planning, setting of objectives and determining courses of action to achieve a significant impact on the alcohol/drug problems within our community. Team DUI has excelled in developing a community-based team that has raised the awareness of the tragic consequence of alcohol/drug abuse while also creating dialog between parents and their children. We believe through the efforts of Team DUI this past year our youth received a healthier understanding of the consequences of choices they make, helping them to better cope with peer pressure.

The approach of Team DUI is nonjudgmental. We offer our youth respect to make the right choices, allowing them to see that choices they make will have lasting effects on themselves and others for the rest of their lives. Team DUI continually strives to help our youth to understand that even as a passenger in a vehicle of an intoxicated driver, they can become a victim.

This year Team DUI has made numerous presentations at middle schools and high schools throughout Lake County, going into classrooms and assemblies. Our team has worked tirelessly to get our message across to over 2,000 youths within our communities. Our speakers came forth with courage and fortitude as they endured months of emotional stress, reliving painful stories in order to help safeguard our youth. As a group, we understand the impact of driving while intoxicated can have on the victim, the intoxicated driver, their families, friends and the community they live in. Each member of Team DUI fulfills a different role, but our message is very powerful when we work together.

Team DUI brings together a large coalition of individuals from law enforcement agencies, local cities and county officials, educators, social service professionals, young people, adults, victims of intoxicated drivers and people who have driven while intoxicated. This year Team DUI welcomed new members, speakers and additional agencies to our program as the overwhelming commitment of members and communities grew stronger. Each member of Team DUI is dedicated to making our community a safer place.

Summer festivities will soon be in full swing. Team DUI would like to further share our message, reminding the community that along with summer festivities comes accountability that is sometimes forgotten. The accountability comes when you step into a motor vehicle. When you are the driver of a motor vehicle, you hold your passenger's life in your hands along with the life of passengers in other vehicles. Life is the most precious gift that we will ever have. To protect life, you must be accountable for life. When you drink and drive, you are capable of causing great bodily harm or even killing; causing lives to be changed forever. If you see yourself in this description either now or previously, it is not too late to hold yourself accountable and strive to change.

To the countless individuals throughout Lake County, Team DUI offers our appreciation for your continual support. To all Team DUI members, I extend my everlasting gratitude for your heartfelt dedication. Team DUI will continue its efforts in the good fight against drinking and driving, as lives have been saved and many more will be saved.

Team DUI wishes everyone a safe and enjoyable summer.

Team DUI founder Judy Thein is the former mayor and current vice mayor for the city of Clearlake. Her daughter was killed in a drunk driving tragedy.