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Nursing Students to Offer Breathalyzer Screenings at Downtown Bar

March 7, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - To raise awareness about drunk driving and the amount of alcohol it takes to reach legal limits, a group of Illinois Wesleyan University nursing students will offer free breathalyzer screenings at Elroy's in downtown Bloomington (102 W. Washington St.) on Thursday, March 10, from 9 p.m.-1 a.m.

Senior nursing majors Maggie Jamerson, Kellie Neven and Heather Vogeltanz are organizing the effort, which is a continuation of a project begun last year in Normal by Illinois State University and then conducted in the fall by IWU students. Support from the Bloomington Police Department includes providing breathalyzer equipment.

The nursing students - while fulfilling their requirements for a service learning project -also aim to prevent drinking and driving by increasing public awareness; to educate people about the cost of driving under the influence; and to reduce the number of people who drive with blood alcohol levels exceeding Illinois' legal limit of .08 by promoting taxicab service.

The students decided on a Bloomington location this time, Jamerson said, because patrons are more likely to walk from Normal taverns, while driving is more common to and from downtown Bloomington. With the cooperation of Elroy's management, the bar was chosen partly because it is popular with college students.

Neven said patrons' responses to the screenings in the past have been positive.

"A lot of people will blow, thinking they're fine, and be surprised," she said. "People don't realize what their blood alcohol level is."

The students will use dials that estimate people's blood alcohol level based on body weight, the number of drinks they've had and the amount of time they've been drinking. Patrons will first be asked if they think they are OK to drive; they will be encouraged to refrain from taking the breathalyzer test if they still plan to drive if they blow above a .08.

The project was developed with the assistance of Cindy Kerber, adjunct assistant professor of nursing, who also will be conducting related research during the screenings.