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Bob Aaron
Illinois Wesleyan University

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CONTACT: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

Drunken Driving Program Set for IWU on March 7

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Forty-three people across the United States are killed each day. Three hundred and five lives are lost weekly. And, 1,309 die each month.

This statistical slaughter--one victim every 33 minutes--is the result of alcohol-related car crashes.

A brutally blunt program on the hazards and consequences of drunk driving is slated for IWU next month. This innovative program is crafted by three IWU students, who were friends and classmates at Carl Sandburg High School in Orland Park, Ill.

Tragedies of Drunken Driving will take place March 7 at 7:30 p.m. in the Main Lounge of IWU's Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University. The program, which will feature speakers from the DuPage County (Ill.) chapter of the Alliance Against Intoxicated Motorists (AAIM), is open to the public, free-of-charge.

Kate Olmsted, a freshman majoring in English with an emphasis on secondary education from Orland Park, developed the program and is organizing the event. She is assisted by Jenny Applegate, a sophomore majoring in business with a minor in psychology from Oak Forest, Ill., and Jackie Burnette, a sophomore nursing major from Orland Park.

"It's the No. 1 crime in America," Olmsted said, referring to drunk driving, "and it's 100 percent preventable." While we can't prevent many other diseases, when it comes to drunk driving "people are being thoughtless and careless," Olmsted said.

Olmsted and her colleagues have collected many chilling statistics about drunk driving in connection with next month's program:

- 38 percent of all car crashes in 1999 were alcohol related.
- More than 40 percent of all teenage deaths--ages 15-20--occur in car crashes.
- One-third of all drivers arrested for driving "under the influence" are repeat offenders.

The goal of the IWU program, Olmsted explained, is to "enhance awareness of drunk driving by people on campus and inform them of the consequences by letting them hear true stories about how people have been affected by drunk driving."

Prior to the March 7 program, pamphlets and brochures about drunk driving will be distributed to IWU students at meal times. Students also will be encouraged to sign cards, pledging not to drive while intoxicated. Those cards will become part of a raffle where the prize will be a free limousine or cab ride around Bloomington-Normal before and after a dinner on the town.

Tragedies of Drunken Driving will begin with a five-minute slide presentation from the files of Flight for Life, an organization of paramedics who transport injured parties from car wrecks to hospitals.

The slides, Olmsted said, "are very graphic" and portray wrecked cars and injured people.

Three speakers will follow the slide presentation. Nancy Foy, an AAIM official, who lost her husband to a drunk driver, will address the meeting. She will be followed by Mike Kenny, who is a convicted drunk driver. A law-enforcement officer will make a presentation on the legal consequences of drunk driving. The 90-minute program will wrap up with a question-and-answer period.

"Drunk driving is a big problem," said Applegate. "It's a growing problem, but people don't think it is their problem. They don't realize the consequences.

"People endanger their lives and the lives of others," she continued, referring to drunk drivers, "and don't understand the consequences of their own poor choices."

Consequently, Olmsted has set this goal for the program: "If one person changes their point of view, the program will be beneficial."