

# Norfolk Insider

City of Norfolk, NE

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December 22, 2009

## "inTEXTicated"



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Mark Claussen, advisor of the Octagon club- a youth Optimist Club, said the group had a Text-off at both the Norfolk High School and the Lutheran Northeast High School last fall as part of the program to show how dangerous texting while driving is.

First, students at each school competed to see who could text the fastest. Six students at a time were given words to type that included capitalization and proper punctuation without using shortcuts or the T9 function.

In the final competition, the top five texting students were blindfolded and typed to see who was the fastest texter. The lesson on texting while driving was emphasized when the students were then required to drive a police cruiser through an obstacle course of cones while texting.

"We wanted good texters so that students would see that even good texters have trouble texting while driving," Claussen said.

Steve Hecker, captain at the Norfolk Police Department and Gary Krueger, Norfolk police officer, coordinated the event where students drove through a course three times-once without any distractions, once while wearing goggles that made it as if the driver was drunk driving and once while texting. The worst driving was done when the students were texting.

"Research says that the reaction time by people who are texting while driving is reduced by 35% and that their steering control is reduced by 90%," Claussen said.

The driver in the lane next to you swerves in your lane then back out again and then nearly goes through the red stoplight. You glance over and your worst fears are confirmed. The driver is "inTEXTicated."

That is the term that refers to people who text on their phone while driving. The City of Norfolk Police Department and the Norfolk Panther Octagon Club have been working together on a program under Project Ignition, a youth traffic safety program sponsored by the National Youth Leadership Council and the State Farm Foundation to show teens in the area how dangerous it is to text on a phone while driving. Other sponsors of the program are CableOne, TeleBeep and

According to a study done by the University of Utah, drivers who text are six times more likely to crash than people giving their full attention to the road.

"We tell the kids that nothing is so important that you can't wait until you've stopped the vehicle to answer back," Claussen said.

Students were given a survey before and after the demonstration requesting information about their driving and texting habits. The survey showed that 60% of the students said they had driven while texting and 80% had ridden with someone who was also texting.

At the end of the training student were then asked to sign a pledge that says "I know that texting has a time and place and behind the wheel is not one of them. I understand that driving while inTEXTicated not only endangers myself and others, but is also illegal. I pledge that I will not text while driving or ride with someone who is."

The Octagon Club submitted their application to inform students on safe driving in the spring 2008. They received \$1000 for "Driven by Distraction" and put ads on CableOne in 2008 and 2009 encouraging people not to text and drive. They also distributed t-shirts and key tags discouraging the practice. They received \$2000 when they found out their program entitled "Don't Drive InTEXTicated" was in the top 25 in the nation in 2009. They are now competing to be one of the top ten finalists, who would receive \$5000 to present the program at the National Service-Learning Conference in San Jose, California in March, 2010. Of these ten, one will be selected as "Best of the Best" and will receive a \$10,000.00 prize.

"Drivers have enough distractions without putting a lot of their attention towards typing a message to someone. We hope to change kids and their parents' attitudes towards this so that they will make a commitment not to text while driving," Claussen said.

For more information about Project Ignition go to <http://www.sfprojectignition.com/>.