

Toma blasts message concerning drug abuse

BY SANDRA KNAUB

David Toma, ex-cop turned anti-drug crusader, blasted his high-powered drug abuse message to an audience of nearly 2,000 Millersville area parents and educators at Pucillo Gymnasium on Tuesday evening, Nov. 16.

Toma, whose career as an undercover detective served as the model for the TV show, "Baretta," was brought to the Millersville area by the Penn Manor School District's newly-formed Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention committee (Penn Dap).

In addition to addressing the adult crowd at Pucillo, Toma spent two days speaking on the horrors of drug and alcohol abuse to Penn Manor's junior and senior high school students.

At the program, Toma took on the parents of the kids he had confronted earlier in the day.

"You have a hellava problem here - your kids told me!" Toma charged the audience.

He asked the parents if they really "give a damn" about their kids.

"Adult indifference is the key problem of modern society," Toma declared. "Mom and Dad are too busy doing their own thing."

Toma told why he, unlike others, cares for America's young people.

He said that as a police detective for Newark, N.J.'s vice, gambling and narcotics squad, he became concerned with all the kids he saw "living in the gutters."

He said that he started speaking in schools and counseling kids, but the "mob" started to harass him and his family because he was trying to "stop the demand" for illegal drugs.

Toma told the parents in the Pucillo audience that organized crime is "making millions of dollars a year selling drugs to your kids."

Toma said that in order to influence more kids, he decided to make a "big name for himself."

He managed to get himself noticed by Hollywood and the result was the "Baretta" series.

Toma himself was not immune to the drug addiction he warns others about.

According to Toma, he became addicted to tranquilizers, "about 100 a day," after the accidental death of his son several years ago.

After an "uphill struggle" he kicked his habit and now refuses to take any medication at all, he said.

Toma has vivid horror stories to tell about the drugs he is fighting against.

According to one story, his nephew, who had smoked marijuana for years, got a "bad joint" one day and became permanently numb on one side of his body.

Another nephew got hooked on heroin and had to steal \$5,000 a day to support his habit. Toma helped his nephew kick his habit by throwing his drug supply away, tying him to a bed, and forcing him to go "cold turkey."

Toma scoffed at the methadone pro-

grams where addicts are gradually withdrawn from the drug. "You gotta pay, baby," (by going cold turkey) he declared.

Toma also gave grim examples of the mental and physical effects such drugs as PCP (angel dust) and LSD have on young people.

He told of kids killing their entire families while high and about deformed babies being born to young drug users.

Alcohol did not escape Toma's wrath. He said it is the number one killer of teenagers.

He derided parents who are relieved when they discover their kids are "only" getting high on beer instead of narcotics. "Thank God all they do is drink - thank God they only use a pistol instead of a shotgun," Toma mocked.

Toma charged that "80 percent of the nation's teenagers are doing drugs."

"Your kids want your help but you don't know what to do," he accused the parents.

Toma said he knew what to do about the desperate plight of today's families.

He insisted that the meaning of God must be brought back to the schools.

Also, parents must be committed to their kids. "Show them you care about them," Toma commanded.

"Touch your kids," he said. "Insecurity results from a lack of touching, and insecurity breeds dependence on drugs."

Toma said he "practiced what he preached" and that's why kids listen to

him. "I don't smoke or drink and kids respect that."

Toma was well received by the Pucillo audience which gave him a standing ovation at the end of the 2½ hour program.

The warm response was not shared by everyone, however. Some people have suggested that Toma uses "scare tactics" and his own personal charisma to shake up the audiences he addresses.

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One person who disagrees with Toma's methods is Robert Boro, coordinator of Community Life Education, at the Lancaster County Mental Health/Mental Retardation-Drug and Alcohol Program.

Boro said he thinks "Toma is guilty of sweeping generalizations."

"For example," Boro said, "Toma claims that 80 percent of the nation's teenagers are on drugs. Where did he get his statistics?"

Boro said that according to a recent survey done by the MH/MR D&A Program, 37 percent of Lancaster county high school students admitted to trying marijuana "at least once." For habitual users the percentage was even less.

Obviously, the 80 percent cannot be true for Lancaster county, Boro explained.

Also, the "scare tactics" Toma uses have been proven not to work, according to Boro. He cited the films of grisly auto wrecks which "have failed to lessen the incidence of reckless and

drunken driving."

Boro said the "shock treatment" Toma gives may be counterproductive. The scary stories adults like Toma tell may actually turn kids off if their own experiences with drugs tell them something different, he explained.

Then the kids won't listen to anything adults tell them, even if the advice is good, Boro added.

Boro agreed that Toma may have

gotten kids to think but he said "it is hard to tell how effective his speech is as a preventative strategy."

Gary Campbell, principal of Marticville Middle School and the chairman of Penn Dap, agreed that Toma was not the cure-all for the drug abuse problem.

Campbell said, "Toma was only 5 percent of what we (Penn Dap) wanted to accomplish. We wanted someone with a big name to call attention to our prevention program."

Now that attention is gained, Campbell said that Penn Dap will follow up with programs that deal with some of the underlying aspects of drug/alcohol abuse prevention - factors such as self-esteem, family communication skills, decision making skills and peer pressure.

Campbell said that the \$5,000 Toma received for his appearances in Penn Manor came from public donations by civic groups and businesses in the Millersville and Lancaster area.



Toma warns parents, students and educators about the dangers of drug abuse. Toma reflects his past personal drug experiences.

(Photos by Kirk Bauer)