

Idaho policeman advises parents how to detect youth drug use

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Hiding from mainstream society in plain sight.

The drug culture now tearing at the fabric of the United States might best be described this way, according to Jermaine Galloway, an Idaho law enforcement officer who gave illuminating presentations on the subject in Union County Monday.

Galloway spoke of a drug culture that operates legally in shopping malls and on main streets unbeknownst to earnest community leaders fighting it.

The law enforcement officer said it is critical that people realize this in order to address the problem.

“You can’t stop what you don’t know,” said Galloway, a Boise resident who, at 6 feet 9 inches, gives anti-drug and alcohol presentations on behalf of his company, Tall Cop Says Stop.

Galloway cites head shops as a perfect example. Head shops are retail outlets specializing in “market-specific paraphernalia, everything that promotes the drug culture.”

Many head shops are easy to spot. Others, however, are covert, posing as youth-oriented stores that sell non-drug-related items when their primary merchandise is drug paraphernalia. The drug link of their merchandise is not always obvious to outsiders. It often includes clothing with compartments for hiding drugs, including shoes with pull outs in the middle of their soles.

Sandals with bottle openers attached are another item carried by head shops that people may mistake for harmless when they are actually a gateway to the drug world. Galloway points out that a new student at school wearing such sandals will quickly be approached by substance abusers, telling the individual where parties are and the best ways to obtain alcohol and drugs.

“Sandals (with bottle openers) are a quick and easy ID,” said Galloway during a presentation to adults at the Chaplin Building.

Any clothing with the late Jamaican singer-songwriter Bob Marley should also send up red flags. Marley is an icon in the drug world because his music openly embraced drug use. Still, one can never assume that because an individual wears a Marley T-shirt, he or she is a drug dealer or abuses drugs. It could be that the individual likes the music of Marley, who died in 1981.

“It (a Marley T-shirt) does mean that the person is definitely someone you should watch,” Galloway said. “He is more at risk.”

Anyone wearing clothing displaying the initials SRH should also be monitored. Teenagers tell adults SRH stands for “Supporting Radical Habits” but get a young person to speak honestly and he or she will reveal that the letters actually stand for “Stoners Wreaking Havoc,” Galloway said.

Galloway also spoke extensively about alcohol abuse among young people. He said many are being tricked into drinking large quantities of alcohol by the marketing of alcoholic energy drinks. These beverages combine alcohol with caffeine, ginseng and other ingredients associated with non-alcoholic energy drinks. Many have powerful fruit flavorings that overwhelm the taste of alcohol.

To illustrate the danger of alcoholic energy drinks Galloway held up a 23.5-ounce can of one such drink and shared a stunning message — the can contained as much alcohol as five or six beers plus as much caffeine as five cups of coffee.

Many youths do not realize this, thinking that consuming such a product is like drinking a single beer, Galloway said. He noted that a construction worker drinking a single beer would seem to be drinking more alcohol than a girl downing a 23-ounce energy drink when the reverse is true.

The size of the alcoholic energy drinks sold is part of the problem. Many young people believe that despite the energy drink’s potency, one large can represents a serving they should consume in one sitting, Galloway said.

The deceptive nature of alcoholic energy drinks is further compounded by their placement in stores. They are often put next to similar looking cans of non-alcoholic energy drinks, making it less apparent that they contain alcohol.

Alcoholic energy drinks are sold in convenience stores in Oregon and Idaho, but in some states are restricted to liquor stores, Galloway said.

The popularity of alcoholic energy drinks is a disturbing trend as is the return of a new fad — saturating gummy bear candy in

vodka, Galloway said. Young people are doing this and then bringing them to school.

“This fad is back,” Galloway said.

Adults should be on the lookout for students who are eating gummy bears slowly and sharing them with friends. Some students enjoy eating vodka-saturated gummy bears in front of unsuspecting adults.

“It is cool for them to get one over on us,” Galloway said.

Another alarming trend is the emergence of “vodka balling.” Youths doing this pour vodka into their eyes to get a buzz. Galloway showed a video of youths doing this and said youths are putting their eyes at risk by “vodka balling.” Ophthalmologists interviewed in the video said the vodka can blind people by causing scarring.

Galloway urges adults who know of drug and alcohol abuse among young people to step up and say something. He said there is no middle ground in the battle to curb alcohol abuse among young people.

“As an adult, you are either for or against it. If you don’t say anything against it, you are (perceived by young people) as being) for it.”

Galloway also spoke at several local schools Monday. His talks were sponsored by the Center for Human Development, the Union County Safe Communities Coalition and Oregon Department of Transportation Traffic Safety.

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