

## Driven to stay sober

By TRACY WARD, News Reporter  
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### **The garden at one end of Troy High School is cold and bleak this time of year. The trampled remains of last year's flowers poke out of the mud between stark rocks.**

But nearly every time she passes it, Lauren Wendt remembers why the garden was built - as a memorial to Ashley Easterbrook, a senior killed by a drunken driver just five days before she was supposed to graduate in 1997.

It isn't even that the two were friends. It's just one day Easterbrook was there. And then she was gone. "I remember that day," says Wendt, 18, now president of Troy High's Students Against Driving Drunk chapter (SADD). "There was a lot of crying. You'd walk into class and it was silent."

Maybe that's why Wendt and other Troy High students - together with students from Shrine High School in Royal Oak - are working so hard to help save a Mother's Against Driving Drunk (MADD) TeamSpirit Power camp for high school kids. Run by young adults, the camp is designed to teach kids all over the state how to spread the message about the dangers of drinking and driving.

Now in its seventh year, however, the camp is jeopardized by a lack of funding. It costs nearly \$60,000 for the weeklong camp, scheduled to be held July 30-Aug. 4 for 200 campers at Michigan State University. The money is used to pay for everything from speakers to insurance.

"We had to tell them it might not happen this year, so they wouldn't be disappointed or surprised," says Shannon Garrison, youth issues coordinator for the state MADD office in Midland. "But once they heard it, they just said, 'Hey, we're going to do all we' and they came up with these big projects." "This camp, it's amazing," Garrison adds. "You see these kids coming together for a good time and it's sober and drug-free."

So 20 high school students from around the state, mostly kids who have attended the camp and now are counselors, have put together auctions, soda can drives and are even selling candy bars to meet the May 1 money deadline. Tyler Boone, 15, a Troy High sophomore, has written companies across Oakland County seeking donations for their April 8 dinner auction at The Royalty House in Warren. His grandmother even donated a handmade quilt. Other items include everything from software to hair salon gift certificates.

Troy senior Courtney Young, 18, has collected soda cans and gone door-to-door in downtown Birmingham soliciting gift certificates from businesses for the auction. She's sold boxes of candy bars. "Our school has lots of sugar addicts," Young says with a smile. Other Troy High SADD members working on the project include Amy Zhang, Suchetha Sastry and Chris Ott. Other TeamSpirit students are located everywhere from Pinckney to Mount Pleasant.

Ashley Easterbrook's father, David Easterbrook, vice president of Oakland County MADD, was really supportive of the student group's efforts. "It just makes the streets safer for all us, helping these kids learn about drunk driving and teaching it to others," says Easterbrook, who with his wife created the Ashley Marie Easterbrook Scholarship Foundation after his daughter's death and donated the garden to Troy High School. He recently established a Web site for the foundation.

The fact is, says Easterbrook, people are still dying. Last year, there were 36 people killed in alcohol-related crashes in Oakland County, a 50-percent increase over 1998. Statewide, 525

people were killed last year. In 1997, Ashley Easterbrook - a popular girl who competed as a gymnast and worked at the local pool as a lifeguard, was just four days away from graduating, when she was killed. A drunken driver crashed into a car she was a passenger in at Crooks and Long Lake roads in Troy.

Also killed were Andrew Stindt, 19, of Troy and Michael Jamieson, 19. All told that early summer, Troy lost four young people to drunken driving crashes. Carol Ravicchio, Oakland County MADD president, says the camp helps kids learn how to deal with pressures they encounter in every day life. Ravicchio's brother-in-law was left a severely brain damaged quadriplegic in a 1971 crash with a drunken driver. He lived 11 years like that before he died.

"These kids are fighting an uphill battle ... they put together an action plan and go back to their schools and implement their plans," Ravicchio says. "It's not all doom and gloom, it's fun, but it's definitely teaching them to make the right choices and to be responsible and to not drink and drive. It's amazing to watch these kids coming into camp. They're shy, quiet, thinking that they stand alone and, then all of a sudden, they're with 100 kids who think and feel as they do. It's unbelievable."

Ravicchio says she's so proud of kids. "MADD just couldn't do it this year. We were being honest with the kids that the money just wasn't there," she says. "They have such determination. They know what they're doing is the right thing and they want to share this with the rest of their peers."

Bob and Donna Brokenshire lost their 17-year-old daughter Kathy, a Troy Athens student, in 1986 to a drunken driver. They have been staunch supporters of the camp. Bob Brokenshire says the state has applied for grants that will likely fund most of the camp, but they are still waiting for final approval.

"What happened to Kathy kind of kicked us off on it, but right now we do it for the other kids, my younger son was 9 years old when Kathy died," Brokenshire says. "There wasn't much more we could do for her, but we could do something for Mike and his older brother. Mike's 22 now."

Troy mother Lola Boone says her son was transformed by the camp. He's been committed to raising money to keep the camp up and running. "When Tyler came home that weekend, after he learned they didn't have money for the camp, it was a very, very big deal to him," Boone says. "He said 'We're going to do this.' And they've been very dedicated."

Wendt, walking to the Easterbrook "Friendship Garden" this week, says the garden is a good reminder for everybody in the school. The graduating class will be the last class who remembers Ashley Easterbrook. "You know, it really is pretty in the spring. The environmental club plants flowers and sometimes, we hold our (SADD) meetings out here." To register for the MADD TeamSpirit Power Camp, call MADD at 1 (517) 631-MADD.

Tickets for the April 8 auction, "The Spirit of Spring," are \$40 per person or \$70 per couple. For information, or to donate items to support the auction, call Garrison at the state MADD offices in Midland at (517) 631-MADD.