

Honorary Way Recognizes Gene Mills

Former Board Member Gene Mills, who passed away in December 2020, was honored in Ravenna as the newest Honorary Way Recipient. He lived a life dedicated to helping others, especially children, in Portage County. He served on our Board for more than 13 years and was an active member of Ravenna Rotary.

Pictured are Board members Bill Nome and Frank Hairston with former Board member Bill Wisniewski at the ceremony.



Crisis Intervention Team Training



The Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County hosted a spring Crisis Intervention Team Training for Portage County police officers. The class had 20 participants from 10 different departments, including the Sheriff's Office and Portage Park District. The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) is an innovative first-responder model of police-based crisis intervention training to help persons

with mental disorders and/or addictions access medical treatment rather than place them in the criminal justice system due to illness-related behaviors. It also promotes officer safety and the safety of the individual in crisis.

While the focus of the class is to practice communication skills and de-escalation techniques, the participants also learned about substance use disorders, the specialized court dockets for mental health and substance abuse, intellectual disabilities, and self-care.

Parents Who Host Lose the Most!

Summer is finally here. It is the season of graduation parties, picnics, and bonfires. As people are excited to gather again after the pandemic closures, the Portage Substance Abuse Community Coalition would like to remind adults about the health and safety risks of serving alcohol to youth at parties.

“Underage drinking poses a range of risks and negative consequences,” said John Garrity, PhD, executive director of the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County. “We encourage everyone, especially parents, to send a unified message that teen alcohol consumption is unhealthy, unsafe, and unacceptable.”



Parents and guardians supplying alcohol to those who are underage is one of the leading factors behind underage drinking. Studies show that alcohol consumption by adolescents interferes with brain development and may cause learning problems. Youth who start drinking before the age of 15 are more likely to report academic problems, substance abuse, and delinquent behavior in both middle and high school. By young adulthood, early alcohol use was associated with employment problems.

Not only is it ethically inappropriate to provide youth with alcohol, but it is also illegal. As a parent, you cannot give alcohol to your teen’s friends under the age of 21 under any circumstance, even in your own home, even with their parent’s permission. You cannot knowingly allow a person under 21, other than your own child, to remain in your home or on your property while consuming or possessing alcohol.

Adults could be charged with a 1st degree misdemeanor carrying a maximum of 180 days in jail and \$1000 fine per charge.

In considering these risks the “What ifs” must also be considered. “What if someone drinks at the residence and is involved in a horrific accident resulting in serious injury and/or death? Serious felony charges and civil lawsuits could be pursued against the host,” stated Portage County Municipal Court Judge Kevin Poland.

Parents can help by talking to their youth about the dangers of drinking and by supervising parties. Encourage teens to participate in healthy and fun activities that do not involve alcohol. Parents can also serve as positive role models by drinking responsibly if they choose to drink.

Research shows that children whose parents are actively involved in their lives are less likely to drink and report that parents are the leading influence in their decision not to drink.

Youth Led Projects Build Protective Factors

High school students from Portage County gathered for a Youth Summit in early 2020 to discuss social problems such as vaping, alcohol use, and social media bullying in their schools and communities. The student leaders finished the day by developing action plans to implement at their schools.

This was part of an effort to increase youth led prevention activities in Portage County. In youth led prevention, youth are given a voice in planning, decision-making, implementation, evaluation, and recognition processes. Students hear directly from their peers about how to handle issues and then they develop programs to enhance the protective factors and build resilience.

“The youth projects included ways for them to increase developmental assets for themselves and for their school community,” explained Dr. John Garrity, executive director of the Mental Health & Recovery Board. “Developmental assets are building blocks for health development that help young people grow up to be healthy, caring, and responsible.”

This past year, Tiffany Rittenour, a prevention specialist from Townhall II, has been working to guide the students with their projects. “It was difficult to continue with the projects because of the pandemic. I wasn’t able to go into the school buildings and meet in person with the students,” Rittenour explained.

The students at Streetsboro High School did continue with their project to reach out to the entire school body through engaging activities to create a sense of belonging. They added daily announcements to let students know about club meetings and activities, held spirit days, and purchased a spirit rock for the high school.

“The Youth-Led project was a very positive experience for our students this spring,” said Streetsboro School Counselor Ira Campbell. “Coming off such a stressful year for everyone, what the students planned to raise school spirit was refreshing. It brought about a sense of community and togetherness and students were excited to participate and have a little bit of normalcy back in their lives.”

Townhall II has provided smaller youth led prevention projects to Portage schools for several years, but this past year was the first time they were able to have a dedicated staff member to advise youth led projects through funding the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County received from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) K-12 Prevention Education Initiative.



UNDERAGE DRINKING

Underage drinking is a serious public health problem in the United States. Alcohol is the most widely used substance of abuse among America's youth, and drinking by young people poses enormous health and safety risks.

The consequences of underage drinking can affect everyone. We all feel the effects of the aggressive behavior, property damage, injuries, violence, and deaths that can result from underage drinking. This is not simply a problem for some families—it is a nationwide concern.



Underage drinking poses a range of risks and negative consequences. It is dangerous because it:

- **Causes many deaths & injuries**
Serious injury and deaths due to alcohol include: vehicle crashes, homicides, alcohol poisoning, falls, burns, drowning, and suicides.
- **Impairs judgment**
Drinking can lead to poor decisions about engaging in risky behavior, including drinking and driving, sexual activity (such as unprotected sex), and aggressive or violent behavior.
- **Trouble with the Law**
Drinking may cause youth to have trouble in school or with the law. Drinking alcohol also is associated with the use of other drugs.
- **Increase risk for substance use disorders**
Research shows that people who start drinking before the age of 15 are 4 times more likely to meet the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lives.
- **Interferes with brain development**
Research shows that young people's brains keep developing well into their 20s. Alcohol can alter this development, potentially affecting both brain structure and function. This may cause cognitive or learning problems. This is especially a risk when people start drinking young and drink heavily.

The Role Parents Play

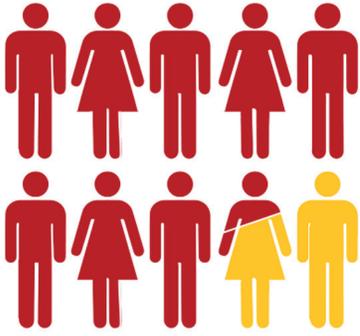
Parents and teachers can play a big role in shaping young people's attitudes toward drinking. Parents in particular can have either a positive or negative influence.

Parents can help by:

- Talking about the dangers of drinking
- Drinking responsibly, if they choose to drink
- Serving as positive role models in general
- Not making alcohol available
- Getting to know their children's friends
- Having regular conversations about life in general
- Connecting with other parents about sending clear messages about the importance of not drinking alcohol
- Supervising all parties to make sure there is no alcohol
- Encouraging kids to participate in healthy and fun activities that do not involve alcohol

Research shows that children whose parents are actively involved in their lives are less likely to drink alcohol.

On the other hand, research shows that a child with a parent who binge drinks is much more likely to binge drink than a child whose parents do not binge drink.



83% of youth report parents are the **leading influence** in their **decision to not drink alcohol.**
(The Foundation for Advancing Alcohol Responsibility)

Youth who start drinking before age 15 are **5X more likely** to develop **alcohol dependence** or abuse later in life than those who begin drinking at or after age 21. (CDC)



Warning Signs of Underage Drinking

Adolescence is a time of change and growth, including behavior changes. These changes usually are a normal part of growing up but sometimes can point to an alcohol problem. Parents and teachers should pay close attention to the following warning signs that may indicate underage drinking:

- Changes in mood, including anger and irritability
- Academic and/or behavioral problems in school
- Rebelliousness
- Changing groups of friends
- Low energy level
- Less interest in activities and/or care in appearance
- Finding alcohol among a young person's things
- Smelling alcohol on a young person's breath
- Problems concentrating and/or remembering
- Slurred speech
- Coordination problems



Treating Underage Drinking Problems

Screening young people for alcohol use and alcohol use disorder is very important and may avoid problems down the road. Screening by a health practitioner (e.g., pediatrician) provides an opportunity to identify problems early and address them before they escalate. It also allows young people to ask questions of a knowledgeable adult. NIAAA and the American Academy of Pediatrics both recommend that all youth be regularly screened for alcohol use.

Some young people can experience serious problems as a result of drinking, including alcohol use disorder, which require intervention by trained professionals. Professional treatment options include:

- Seeing a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, or other trained professional
- Participating in outpatient or inpatient treatment at a substance abuse treatment facility or other licensed program

If you have questions or concerns about a loved one contact Addiction Helpline at Townhall II: 330.678.3006