

DU TODAY

Tuesday, March 23, 2010

Freshman duo starts alcohol awareness program on campus

Jordan Ames (mailto:dutoday@du.edu)

March 22, 2010

Gordie Bailey was an 18-year-old freshman at the University of Colorado when he died in 2004 of alcohol poisoning resulting from a fraternity initiation ceremony.

University of Denver freshmen Gabby Masucci and Juliet Ourisman want to keep such a tragedy from happening at DU. Together, they have formed a chapter of the "Circle of Trust" program.

The peer-to-peer education program is a part of the Gordie Foundation, a nonprofit founded by Bailey's parents to provide young people with skills to navigate the dangers of alcohol, binge drinking, peer pressure and hazing.

The DU chapter is one of more than 50 on college and high school campuses across the nation. The primary purpose of each chapter is to promote alcohol awareness and keep the issues on the minds of students.

Masucci and Ourisman first learned of Bailey's story while attending the Taft School in Watertown, Conn., with his sister, Lily.

"After learning more about the foundation, we were both able to become involved in the club established at Taft," Masucci says. "We started the chapter at DU because we believe that college students can greatly benefit from the foundation and its mission to provide information about the effects of binge drinking, dangers that coincide and what can be done to prevent tragedies."

The group already has made their presence known. The chapter participated in National GORDIEday in fall 2009. Masucci and Ourisman passed out a variety of educational materials on the Driscoll Bridge throughout the day.

They also hope to present the 2008 documentary HAZE to the DU community this spring. The documentary presents the issue of alcohol abuse through a variety of interviews, real-life footage and emergency medical calls.

"While the elements of the documentary are certainly disturbing, they are intended to inspire and encourage a change in the mentality associated with drinking," Masucci says.

While the chapter is not currently a licensed organization under the Undergraduate Student Government, the duo hopes to expand the group and complete the licensing process soon.

"I think that binge drinking is an important issue to be discussed because it at times can result in very, very devastating results," Ourisman says. "Both Gabby and I really hope that the Gordie Foundation becomes a prominent group in the DU community."

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