

July 2006

Greetings, everyone! We hope everyone is enjoying the summer season thus far and that everyone is taking full advantage of all the fun activities it has to offer. Despite a few brushes with some nasty weather, it has been a pretty nice summer and it will be all too soon before we are all complaining about the snow and the cold!

Summertime brings us the opportunities to frog around and do things that we don't normally get to do year-round in Wisconsin thanks to vacations, longer days, etc, and that is fine but it also brings us to the topic of this month's article: School is out and so are the kids! School vacations are needed for our children because it gives them a chance to relax, to earn some money with their first jobs, etc. However, it also provides them with additional opportunities to raise some Cain and in some cases get into more trouble, and unfortunately in some instances, get hurt. We would like to address this issue this month not by pointing fingers at anyone, not by boring you with endless statistics, but by relating a few recent instances to illustrate our point here.

We are facing some very real problems here in our area and other surrounding and supporting communities. We (Law Enforcement) have had to deal with quite a rash of vandalism, underage drinking and drug usage, burglaries, traffic accidents, and general maliciousness lately. These problems have been around for ages untold, of course, but the frequency that they are occurring and the increasing property damage and sometimes the health risks associated with them are becoming alarming.

Recently, we have received numerous complaints regarding underage drinking parties in the area, some at residences within the Village limits and some even with PARENTS (and/or homeowners) PRESENT and condoning them! This never ceases to amaze me, especially in light of one case last year when one area teen nearly died from alcohol poisoning at one of these parties where the parents were present, and another more recent case where a teen left a drinking party only to cause a serious traffic accident on Hwy 16 which resulted in two people transported to the hospital and the teen being arrested for OWI. We get many complaints as to why we don't put a stop to these parties, and our answers are usually simple: because we can't just enter a residence without the owner's permission and the kids know that. So, when parents go away for a weekend or something similar and wholeheartedly trust their teen to stay home all weekend, do their homework and chores, and have no parties, well... I am the first one to say that our kids generally need more well-developed senses of self-discipline, motivation and obligation in this day and age, but the above expectation is a little like putting a fox in charge of a hen house! And when the parents are at the residence and condoning this behavior in the first place, well, hopefully you can see the frustration in that.

Parents have every right to get away for a weekend by themselves once in a while and there is definitely a point at which you need to start trusting your teenagers and giving them more responsibilities, but is there anything wrong with employing a sneaky aunt/uncle or grandma/grandpa to make a few unannounced visits throughout that weekend to make sure everything is kosher? Not to our way of thinking. We (the Police Department) have even been granted permission in rare instances by some parents who are at their wits' end to enter their residence in their absence when they suspected a drinking party may be occurring, and this has worked out well in the past. We are not necessarily suggesting that approach

because we don't like invading people's privacy anymore than we like our own invaded. However, something needs to be done here, and quickly.

Our kids are getting a little out of control here, and we need some help from their parents. Come to think of it, not that much help is required; maybe just a little tighter supervision is all. For example, it is fine to let kids borrow a car to drive around a little with their friends. This is a necessary part of the teenage experience, but until 2am, 3am, 4am??? No, that is not ok. Teenaged drivers can be frightening enough by themselves, but in packs of 3 or 4??? That is definitely when more accidents happen, and lately there have been some fairly severe accidents in our area, whether drinking/drugging was involved or just screwing around and not paying attention.

These times are also when crimes seem to be committed as well. Our Ordinance Code sets curfew at 11:00pm unless special circumstances exist, and Fall River Officers are pretty lenient, but where exactly do our kids need to go in Fall River at 1 or 2am? Could it be to go to and from work or a school function? That could be. Could it be to throw concrete blocks through the School Principal's office window and at the School's front doors? That could be too.

Proof-reading this article so far, we realize it is reading like somewhat of an indictment of *all* our parents and *all* our kids, and that is certainly not the intention here. The intention here is to apprise you all of the current problems that exist and to let you know that with our limited resources we simply can't be everywhere at once serving every citizen simultaneously and therefore instead of the public asking us for help, we are now asking for help from the public. We *know* there are drinking parties in town, we *know* our kids are vandalizing property, we *know* our kids are driving recklessly and sometimes (unfortunately) intoxicated, we *know* our kids are using drugs; what we don't always know is when, where and/or how we can intervene, so we need your help.

Certainly, if you witness these things, call us and report it, don't ignore them or cover them up; you are not helping the kids in the long run. Assist us in our investigations of these matters, don't try to hinder us; we will always work closely with cooperative families to try to help kids learn from their mistakes and not pay for them forever. That is not to say we won't take enforcement action, but sometimes hard lessons are the longest lasting ones, and we promise we will always work with cooperative families. And finally, help us check up on your kids when they are not at home with you! If they say they are going to a friend's house for a few hours, don't call them on their cell phone (why kids need cell phones I'll never know, but that is for another month), call the friend's parents and check! If they say they are going to a game or dance at school, would it hurt the war effort to take 30 minutes and check and see if they are indeed there?

The Fall River Police Department is more than willing to meet and speak with any and all parents who are concerned about their children and their safety. Again, this is not an indictment of parenting skills, this is our way of calling for help to make sure your kids enjoy their teen years safely and soundly. As always, If you have any questions regarding this topic or any others, please call us at 484-3707 or visit us on the web at www.fallriverpd.com

Happy Summer!

The Fall River Police Department