

# SAFE Inc., works to spread message of Red Ribbon Week

## *A little bit of prevention can go a long way*

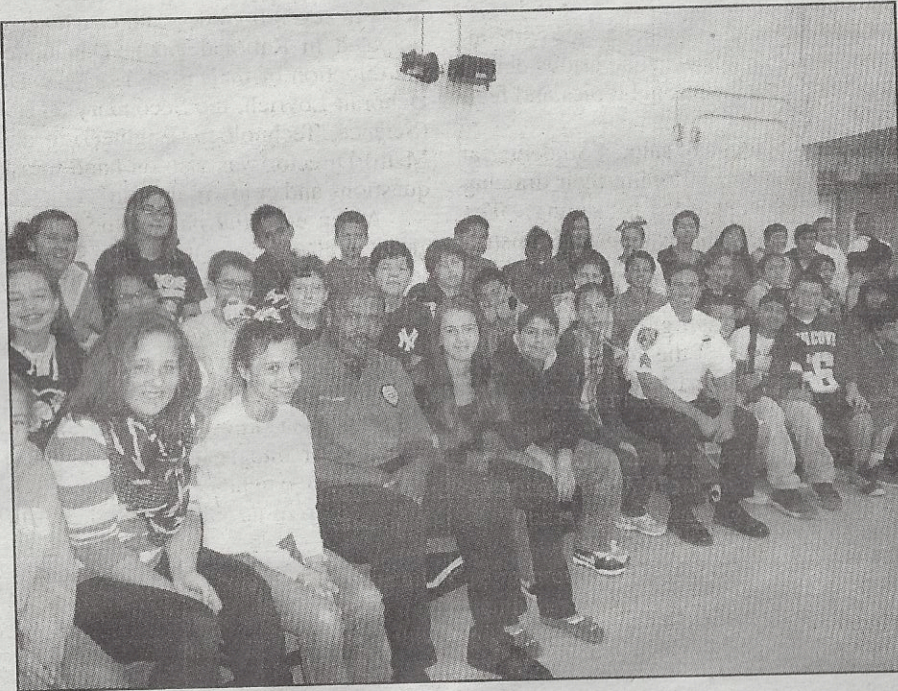
Red Ribbon Week, a national drug awareness campaign, was created in 1985 to address the importance of substance abuse prevention. During this important week SAFE Inc., the only substance abuse prevention agency in Glen Cove, sponsors a citywide prevention celebration, working together with Mayor Suozzi's office, the Glen Cove School District, PTA, Glen Cove Police Department, Glen Cove Senior Center, the Inter-Agency Council and the North Shore Clergy to help spread Red Ribbon Week's message throughout the community.

SAFE, Inc. partnered with each of the Glen Cove School District's elementary schools art teachers and clinical staff who worked with youth to create prevention art work/ posters to celebrate the weeklong event. SAFE's Board of Directors traditionally judge the art work, choosing 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners and presenting prizes at each school within the district.

"We are happy to be able to sponsor this nationwide event each year and provide all district students with red ribbons that state a positive prevention message," SAFE's Executive Director, Dr. Sharon Harris said.

Last year, with the assistance of SAFE's Coalition Co-Chair Tony Gallo and School Committee Chair, Denise KERNAN, Red Ribbon Week was expanded to include the Finley Middle School in the annual celebration. Students attended a presentation led by Coalition members from the Glen Cove Police Department, Sgt. Christopher Ortiz and Detective Gerald Williams. Both grew up in Glen Cove and told the children gathered in the gym that they sat on the very same bleachers.

"Detective Williams and I have been exposed to some of the things you've



been exposed to and will be exposed to," said Ortiz. "We want to give you the tools you'll need to deal with this. SAFE, the Glen Cove Police Department and the Glen Cove School District believe it's important to keep giving these lessons so you'll know what to do."

Ortiz and Williams' presentation included a power point component that with several videos depicting extreme athletes and other young people who ruined their lives as a result of being involved in substance abuse.

"Extreme skateboarder Christian Hosoi was on top of the world but he decided to make the decision of smoking weed which let to all kinds of other drugs including heroine," he said. "You know of Tony Hawk - he was once a competitor of Hosoi but you don't know Hosoi because he's serving a 20 year sentence now. He made a bad decision and it cost him."

The presentation stressed the repercussions of making bad decisions and facts about the drugs of today and just how easy it is to get addicted. He also explained why taking pills without a prescription can be deadly.

"One blue pill looks like another to me because I'm not a doctor," he said. "And the weed today is not like it was even five years ago. It's genetically altered and chemically engineered so it is more powerful."

He compared the risks involved in extreme sports and those from drugs and alcohol. In extreme sports people train, condition their bodies and wear protective gear. Ortiz said that there is no way to minimize the risks involved in taking drugs.

"The only way is to not do it all," he said. "The first time you do drugs you could die."

The police officers explained to the

middle school children that when you become addicted to drugs you are no longer getting high or having fun. Instead you are taking those drugs just to be normal.

"I've taken dead children out of homes where they are lying there with a needle still in their arm," he said. "There is no such thing as a safe drug."

The students were quiet during the presentation only speaking to answer questions from Ortiz and Williams. Ortiz said they've been doing the presentation for the past two years and decided to continue it because it sends such an important message. Growing up in the community, he said that he and Williams understand the pressure children undergo.

The children appeared to be truly affected by the presentation. And they paid attention throughout.

"I learned not to use drugs so you don't die," said Adam Andrzejczak. "I didn't know that if you take it once it could kill you," Robert McCarthy added.

Both boys quietly left the gym passing another noisy class of middle school children entering the gym. They were there for the second presentation.

For further information on any SAFE Inc. upcoming events please call (516) 676-2008. SAFE Inc. is a not for profit tax exempt substance abuse education and prevention agency located in Glen Cove. Visit our website at [www.safe-glencove.org](http://www.safe-glencove.org) and follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/GlenCovePride-Coalition](http://www.facebook.com/GlenCovePride-Coalition).

*SAFE Coalition members Sgt. Ortiz and Detective Williams from the GCPD with middle school children from Finley after a preventative education workshop they led for Red Ribbon Week.*