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News

Publication Date: Thursday, April 03, 2008

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Author gets real with Keokuk High School students during special program about intimate relationships

By Diane Vance/Gate City Staff Writer

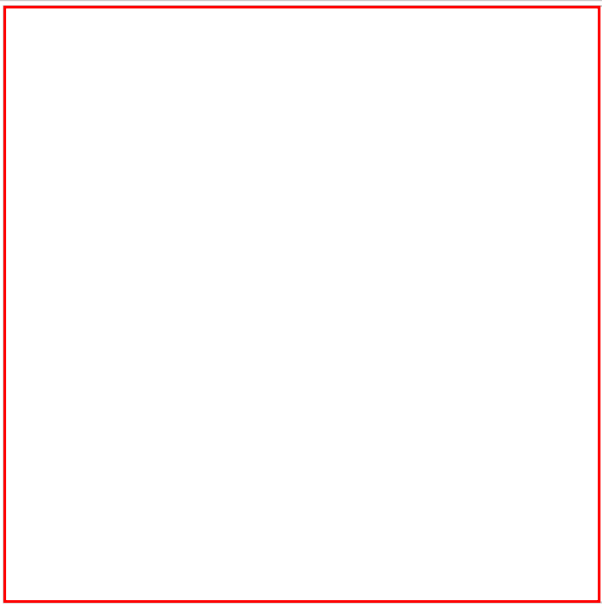
Published: Thursday, April 3, 2008 1:53 PM CDT

Keokuk High School student council members handed out Hersey's chocolate kisses at random in the last few weeks at school. On Wednesday the sidewalks around the U-drive had chalk messages "Can I Kiss You?" and reminders of a school assembly at 1:30 p.m.

Freshmen through seniors gathered in the gym Wednesday, spilling from the bleachers onto the floor, seated all the way up to where the invited guest stood.

National speaker Michael Domitrz and author of the book "Can I Kiss You?" was sponsored by Tri-State Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Abuse to speak with all Lee County high school and middle school students.

Domitrz moved quickly into his presentation with KHS students, calling for a volunteer. Matthew



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came forward.

"OK, you're on a date, it's going well, you're close to the girl," said Domitrz. "What do you do, or how do you know you're going to kiss her?"

Matthew answered he gives "the look" and kisses her.

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"Where does this type of behavior take place?"

Students answered - at the movies because it's dark, in a car and at parties.

"What happens at parties?" he asked the students. "What influences people to do this at parties?"

"Drinking" was the resounding chorus of students' voices.

Domitrz said he would use two characters, Jim and Julie, and set a scenario. He asked questions throughout his narrative, giving students a chance to participate and tell him how things happen in Keokuk.

"At just about every party there is a guy like Jim," he said. "He is bringing Julie drinks, six or seven or eight throughout the evening. He drinks only two or three. Who has the larger body? Usually Jim. So why is he setting her up?"

Students reply, "so he can get her in bed."

"You like both Julie and Jim," said Domitrz. "They are nice people. Do you interfere?"

A student said no, because it was not her business.

"Jim's a little tipsy and tells you he's going to drive Julie home. Do you stop him now?"

About half the students replied yes; the others no.

"Why would you stop him from driving?" he asked.

Pam Strong is animated while she unwraps a gift at her reception honoring her as Keokuk Teacher of the Year. With her is Woodie Brassil, president of the Keokuk Education Association (teachers' union). He presented the gifts.

Domitrz thanked Matthew and had him sit down. He asked for a female volunteer. Thea stepped up. He asked her how she lets a boy know she's receptive to a kiss on a date. Role-playing, Domitrz sat in a chair next to Thea. She replied she would place her hand on his knee.

"That's the universal answer wherever he asks that question," he said.

"So, ladies, you use body language to communicate with the guys. Are guys good at reading body language?"

There was a loud chorus of "no."

"We've just seen a male and female example and had a lot of laughs," said Domitrz. "I'm not here assuming everyone I'm talking to is dating. I'm not assuming anything about you."

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Because he might kill someone, students said.

"What are the two worst crimes? Any place I go and ask this, people will say murder and rape, just as you did," he said. "Your friend is at a party giving a girl lots of drinks to get her to do something with her body she might not do sober. Why does it make sense to stop someone from driving after drinking but not interfere with someone drinking and putting the moves on someone who's drinking?"

"If you're any friend at all, you can step in. In your heart you know what's going on. Do you think Jim may become violent?"

Students said yes.

"My speaking up changes the picture. Julie's girlfriends are put on notice and will rally around and get her out of there. You answered yes, Jim was likely to get violent. What do you think he was going to do with Julie? And you just told me this happens every weekend here in Keokuk," he said. "You're not preventing a hook-up. You can even tell Jim, you'll get Julie's number and he can call her later when he's not drinking. If there is an attraction there, you haven't killed it by interfering."

Domitrz said words can be very powerful and asked students to stop using derogatory name-calling even in jest. He explored who does the asking for dates or plans the activities. He debunked the notion that guys don't like women to do the asking.

"Women are afraid of rejection, men don't like rejection but they are not afraid of it," he said.

Domitrz, 38, married with four boys, said he didn't always do relationships right. A changing point came in college.

"I was taught to respect women. I have three sisters," he said. "I was told to respect women just as you've probably been told. But no one ever gives the details. I want to give you the details."

He asked students to name signs of respect on a date. Boys replied: paying for the date, opening doors for women, pulling a chair out for her to sit and introducing her to his friends.

"None are signs of respect unless you do it for every woman, always," said Domitrz. "If you're doing this on dates, it's about playing the game. You're trying to impress her. It doesn't last, does it?"

When he was a sophomore in college, a phone call from home informed him his sister Cheri had been raped.

"I didn't know who did it but I wanted him dead," he said. "I was so enraged. Revenge would land me in jail. Would that have made Cheri's life any better or worse if I was in jail with her rapist?"

He asked students if a guy is making a move on a girl, when does he stop? When he is asked to stop through verbal or body language signals.

"Everyone needs a choice when it comes to their own body," he said. "What's wrong with asking if you can kiss her? If you're sitting there thinking, I can't stop and ask that, you're not ready to be trying to kiss someone."

"Give someone a choice. A choice is before an action occurs. If you kiss someone and get a push, a slap or are asked to stop, that's self-defense to something already happening."

He called for another volunteer and Logan came up.

"Imagine no one else is in the room," said Domitrz.

He role-played looking into Logan's eyes as the two sat side by side in chairs. Leaning in, Domitrz asked, "Can I kiss you? Don't answer that!" and jumped up to much laughter.

"If a partner asks that, what is women's responses? It's that 'aaahhh' sigh they do. I first heard this in college sitting with my teammates and we were all like, 'right, that's going to happen!' and 'I'm not going to try that!'

"But we found 90 percent of women have a positive response. And I thought to myself, well, I'm interested in dating women, not my teammates."

He asked Logan how it felt.

"It felt smooth," Logan said. "Not disruptive."

Girls in the audience said it was romantic, especially since Domitrz prefaced his question by telling his "date" he was nervous.

"Look in her eyes, be honest," he said. "It will make that date memorable."

Domitrz talked about if leaving the assembly some students started making fun of the subject, to challenge that. He gave suggestions to discourage public displays of affection.

"When alcohol is involved, step in, be a friend," he said. "In intimate moments, if it's the first time or if you've been together a long time, ask, give someone a choice about their body."

Domitrz encouraged students to visit his Web site canikissyou.com and down load a free e-book copy of his book "Can I Kiss You" by typing the word "free" instead of a credit card number. It would only be valid for a few days.

"This is my favorite speaker we've had this year," said Nikki, a junior. "We've had three speakers."

Four boys outside after school all said the assembly was needed.

"It was good," said one. "Asking is something I could do."

Another said the assembly was cool and made him more aware of options.

"I think a lot more people will try to get girls drunk at parties," said a third boy. "People here really needed to hear this. It sounded like the girls found this a positive message. I can respect that."

Domitrz also held evening sessions yesterday first at Keokuk High School, then at Fort Madison High School. He is scheduled to speak again at 6 p.m. today at Central Lee High School in Donnellson. The hour program is open to parents and students at no charge.

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Clifford Kuhn, MD wrote on Apr 4, 2008 9:36 AM:

" I thought comparing drinking and driving with drinking and rape was very effective. Friends don't let friends drive drunk. Neither should they let friends "date" drunk. "

Tim Davis wrote on Apr 4, 2008 7:01 AM:

" When a boy asks a girl if he can kiss her, he is risking rejection which shows confidence. Confidence is very attractive trait for men and for women also. This is a great seminar and a much needed message for us all. "

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