

"Have fun but don't be stupid" message put forth

By DARRELL NESBITT
Staff Writer

Choices is a key word when it boils down in taking a positive or negative direction in life.

Student bodies from grade seven to senior four of the Shoal Lake and Strathclair schools had the privilege of listening to a motivated speaker who has turned negative into a positive, although it took seven years of his life in an Ontario prison, and a rehabilitation program upon being released.

Gary Whyte of Teen Communications, a non-profit organization based in London, Ont., presented a general drug and alcohol assembly at Shoal Lake on the morning of Feb. 16, one of the 10 stops at Manitoba schools in association with the local Teens Against

Drunk Driving (T.A.D.D.) group.

Whyte stressed to the students how a number of factors, situations or influences can take control of one's actions at the teenage years. His hour and a half presentation mixing humour and hard-hitting reality focused on responsible decision making, disease of alcoholism, impaired driving, party smart, and the choices teenagers are faced with today. Through the used of videos, slides, and music, the hard realities of death due to drug overdoses and impaired driving was brought to light including the heart wrenching plea from a father to not drink and drive after he just lost three of his daughters in a Kentucky bus accident. In total, 27 young lives were taken in that accident when



Garry Whyte

a drunk driver, who happened to live, hit a school bus head on. It was relayed that being 18 or 80 to drink and drive is wrong. 90 percent charged with impaired driving are males, and despite

no cure for alcoholism there is help and hope through foundations such as AA, NA and Al-anon.

His seven year stint in the prison system evolved from his decisions at the age of 13, when he became a thrill seeker and experimented with alcohol and drugs. Between the age of 13 and 15 Whyte was involved in an alcohol related car accident, but it was his addiction to drugs which led to crime including bank robberies and eventually prison. Mainlining hard drugs by 15, he developed a \$300-\$400 per day addiction and became a major drug dealer after rebelling against his family and leaving home.

"Looking back I don't regret saying that I am an ex con as at the time of being arrested, I was nothing but a low life scum who

didn't have a care in the world" stated Whyte. "My arrest gave me a new perspective on life."

Upon release from prison in 1989, Whyte became a keynote speaker with the youth-focused, educational, non-profit organization founded to hook-up with schools and assist them in fighting the battle against impaired driving and substance abuse. Married, his time is split between travelling across Canada communicating with Generation X, and as a youth pastor in the London, Ont. region.

In closing, he stressed "Have fun but don't be stupid when dealing with cigarettes, alcohol and/or drugs as in no time it can become out of control."