

Parents urged to combat underage alcohol use

By NATHAN RITZO
Special to the Union Leader

PORTSMOUTH — John Dye had a personal message for the forum at Portsmouth High School Thursday night.

Dye's son Jhaime died at age 20 when he was driving while intoxicated, crashing his car in Rye on June 23 last year.

"I just feel passionate about being here today, just so that I can let other parents know that it's not okay to have your kids drinking," Dye said. "You've got to find a way to pay attention and be responsible for your children so that you don't have to go through what I've been through and am still going through."



JOHN DYE

Addressing a recent state-sponsored youth-risk behavior survey that showed a continuing rise in underage alcohol use from 2005 to 2007, the forum coincided with prom season and the start of summer vacation. It was attended by parents, students, educators, law enforcement officers from Seacoast communities and State Liquor Commission representatives.

Portsmouth's Michael Mag-nant said, "As chief of police, a member of the community and as a parent, I'm very concerned. The school's going to release the results of the survey, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to address the parents about my concerns."

Eddie Edwards, the liquor commission's chief of enforcement of licensing, said grass-

"We need to have a mindset change, a change in the environment, a change of how alcohol is viewed and accepted ..."

EDDIE EDWARDS

NH Liquor Commission's chief of enforcement of licensing

roots forums such as this are essential for reducing underage drinking in any community.

"We realize that we can't resolve the issue simply by having tougher laws, more enforcement," Edwards said. "We need to have a mindset change, a change in the environment, a change of how alcohol is viewed and accepted, particularly with underage use and abuse."

Rye Police Chief Kevin Walsh cited the importance of community partnership, where parents share concerns about other parents' children with each other as though the children involved were their own. He also said many parents view the casual consumption of alcohol by underage drinkers as unimportant.

"My message is that as parents we need to go out and interact with each other, and to know who the other parents are who are accepting this," Walsh said.

He urged other parents to have the courage to speak up and tell the parents who allow underage drinking about the harm they are doing. "We need to have the courage to tell them that (facilitating) underage drinking is wrong."