

Monument Prevention Coalition leader, youth group to be recognized

Written by Kamie Stephen

A group of local teens is being recognized for their work to prevent underage drinking.

The Monument Prevention Coalition Youth Advisory Board will be presented with the Young Leader award during the Project Extra Mile recognition dinner in Omaha on Nov. 19.

Like Monument Prevention, Project Extra Mile is dedicated to advocating for policies and practices that prevent and reduce alcohol abuse and underaged drinking. Every year, the group recognizes individuals and other organizations for their work on the same issues.

Lanette Richards, executive director of Monument Prevention, is also being honored with the Going the Distance award.

Richards said the youth group does several things throughout the year to educate the community about the dangers of underage drinking and binge drinking, including recording monthly public service announcements directed toward both youth and adults that play on local stations.

"They've developed a power point presentation for other youth about why alcohol is so harmful," said Richards. "They directly relate it to activities you're in."

Richards said this peer-to-peer approach is effective, because teens often find other teens more relatable than they would an adult.

"Kids listen to kids," she said.

Adults listen too, Richards said, which is why the group also makes an effort to stay in contact with legislators regarding policies that could affect them — or the next generation.

"If we see bills introduced and there is a concern of how it will affect youth and alcohol, we work with those committees to share the voice of the youth and how they see it."

Once a year, while the legislature is in session, the group makes a trip to Lincoln to meet with senators and share their thoughts.

They also keep in contact with the liquor commission, raising concerns when they hear of a business that allegedly sells to minors and tracking liquor licenses that have been issued in the area.

In addition to educating other kids about the risks of drinking, they also work to educate adults about things like how alcohol can affect the developing brain and the consequences of procuring.

"This is a courageous group," said Richards. "They have to speak up and stand when it is uncomfortable. I'm thankful that is recognized across the state."