

Playing for Prevention

Students vs 1st Responders

Preparing to start the school year off with a bang, 26 students gathered to play against some of the most influential members of our community, the first responders. Members of our local Sheriff's Office and Police Department enjoyed a night of fun, planning basketball with our youth and putting on a good show for the community.

This is an event that Drug Free DeSoto and DeSoto County Sheriff's Office sees growing beyond belief. It's a way for kids to stay focused on the positives of life. They're encouraged to have clean fun, but most importantly it gives them a chance to build relationships with law enforcement despite what's happening in society. Here in DeSoto County our law enforcement officers believe it's a blessing to be connected and not just an officer of the law.



State Decision Makers Visit DeSoto County

August 5, 2019

The federal government recently declared youth vaping, or e-cigarette use, a nationwide epidemic. In light of these concerns and the misinformation surrounding this topic, the Tobacco Free Partnership of DeSoto County and DeSoto Students Working Against Tobacco Youth are working hard to educate parents, educators, youth, community partners, and decision makers on what they need to know about vaping and youth.

In efforts to do just that, DeSoto TFP Members attended a Legislative Wrap-up Breakfast hosted by the DeSoto County Chamber of Commerce. This served as a time for our elected officials to debrief with local residence the many items discussed during session and allowed residents to voice their concerns and ask questions.

The most popular e-cigarette brand is JUUL, a device shaped like a USB drive that is available in a variety of flavors and easy to conceal. In fact, youth are using JUUL devices inside school bathrooms and classrooms. Youth vaping has increased dramatically across the country and in Florida. In 2018, about 25% of Florida high school students reported current use of electronic vaping – a 58% increase compared to 2017. *(FYTS 2018)*



Senator Ben Albritton and Community Health Advocate, Jodie DeLoach

Attending the Legislative Wrap-up Breakfast turned out to be a wonderful event for all involved, especially our partnership members who were able to share our concerns with elected officials in a low key, non-threatening manner. It is always a great pleasure to hear from the individuals that make such incredible decisions on our behalf.

Drug Free DeSoto Coalition is thankful for The Tobacco Free Partnership of DeSoto County and their dedication to our County. Supporting their efforts is one of our top priorities!

Not A Lab Rat Day Exposes How History is Repeating Itself When It Comes to Vaping

October 16, 2019

E-cigarette companies use the same tricks, including flavors and marketing campaigns, that tobacco companies used for decades to target and recruit young smokers (1). Not a surprise considering Big Tobacco companies own or have significantly invested in e-cigarette companies (2,3). These are the same tobacco companies that for decades lied about the addictiveness and health effects of cigarettes (4).

SWAT is Florida's youth-led movement to combat Big Tobacco. *Not A Lab Rat Day* is a statewide initiative that empowers youth to stand up and declare that they refuse to be the tobacco and e-cigarette industry's "lab rats" as we wait and see the long-term health effects of vaping.

The second annual Not A Lab Rat Day in DeSoto County was a great success. Youth at both DeSoto Middle and DeSoto High used this opportunity to dispel myths and educate their peers about the e-cigarette industry's connection to Big Tobacco and inform them that when it comes to e-cigarettes and vaping products, history is repeating itself.

DeSoto Middle School SWAT Youth prepped for the day by completing a poster campaign. Youth created countless posters with anti-vape messaging and hung them all around campus. The day of, October 16th, DMS SWAT Youth hosted a booth in the cafeteria during all 3 lunches. The booth had a simulated smoker's lungs and rats to catch the student's attention, as well as several other educational materials.

SWAT Youth educated their peers by busting myths and sharing statistics, including how they are marketed by big tobacco, that e-liquids are not safe, the unknown health effects of e-cigarettes on the body, and much more. Students were invited to fill out an "I'm not a Lab Rat, I am a ____." cards. Students vowed to remain vape free and filled in the blanks with what they want to be when they grow up. SWAT youth later plans to mail these cards to JUUL, the maker of a very popular electronic cigarette.



Junior Leadership DeSoto



November 21, 2019 – Criminal Justice, Health, and Community Resource Day

Being a rural community, the lack of opportunity to keep youth activity involved, and away from risky behaviors, is always a top of major discussion. The common misconception that one must leave our community after graduation to seek experience is also a concern.

The idea of a program that would provide local youth with the opportunity to learn more about our community and the components that contribute to its success and operation, and encourage these young leaders to advocate for their health and future by living a positive, healthy lifestyle, has been talked about for years. We finally decided to dive in and go for it, and thus, Junior Leadership DeSoto Class I was born.

The program was offered to Juniors and Seniors at DeSoto County High School. Completing an application, writing an essay, and becoming an active member of our Students Working Against Tobacco Club (SWAT) and Drug Free Youth (Df-Y) were a few requirements of being accepted.



Junior Leadership DeSoto Class I got a behind the scenes tour of DeSoto County Sheriff's Office, including Sheriff Potter's Office.

The class met for their first official day in the community on November 21st. The agenda was packed from the minute youth stepped foot onto the bus. The first stop was a private tour of DeSoto County Sheriff's Office. Youth were able to speak one on one with Sheriff Potter, see the inside of the dispatch room, as well as many other offices, and even a portion of the jail.

In addition, the class visited DeSoto County Fire and Rescue – Station 1, DeSoto Memorial Hospital, Wound Care Center, DeSoto County Health Department, and Emergency Management Operations. Youth got to speak with several leaders in our community and learn about the components of their jobs, including education, training, leadership, and the importance of living a healthy lifestyle.



Junior Members, Class Sponsors, and representatives from A+ Environmental Restoration pose beside the autonomous mower. Commissioner Deriso really nailed the solar field tour, as well as sharing the important qualities of a great leader.

Youth were out and about touring the community again on March 12th. This day, our Junior Leaders got a behind the scenes peek into the Arcadia Stockyard, DeSoto Solar Field, Joshua Citrus, and a local fish farm. Youth especially enjoyed learning from Commissioner Deriso with A+ Environmental Restoration. He shared an abundance of leadership qualities with our youth, encouraging them to always work hard, and inspiring them to live out their passion.

When these young leaders are not participating in class days, they are actively educating community partners on the goals and initiatives of our Tobacco Free Partnership and Students Working Against Tobacco, volunteering around the community, and combating tobacco use and social norms.

Overall, it has been as a very eye-opening, positive experience for our youth and we are ecstatic to get this program up and running. It has served as a great opportunity to engage and educate youth, as well as many adults within our community. These young advocates have been able to see the importance of living a healthy, productive lifestyle, while developing their potential and discovering all the career opportunities that lie ahead in our community.



Junior Advocates enjoyed a scrumptious lunch prepared by DeSoto Memorial Hospital and sponsored by Mosaic. During lunch, youth brainstormed ways to become active and give back to our community.

We sincerely want to thank every individual that has contributed to making this initiative a success. A big thank you to Mr. Cline and The DeSoto County School District for supporting this program and providing transportation for our youth. We'd also like to thank each and every class host mentioned above, as well as our lunch sponsors, Mosaic and Drug Free DeSoto Coalition!

We have received many words of praise about the program and really look forward to watching it grow, but more importantly, witnessing the many things these young people accomplish!

In addition to these activities we also participated in the Back to School Fair where we distributed bookmarks and pencil to local students with prevention messaging.

We co-hosted the annual Turner Center Community Trick or Treat in October 2019 where over 1000 kids along with their parents came out to enjoy a fun and safe trick or treating experience.

We assisted with several community health fairs and provided support to community partners during presentations at local schools.