

Hoquiam High School Cheerleaders Win, After Pro Bowl

Local News

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Posted on : February 3, 2012 at 4:40 am

HOQUIAM, Wash. - Fresh off the airplane and their trip to Hawaii (Jan 26-30) where they cheered in the halftime show at the Pro Bowl, the Hoquiam High School cheer team learned that they've been selected by State Farm Insurance to win a \$2000 "Project Ignition" grant, one of only 25 awarded throughout the United States and Canada. The grant, while sizable, also puts the Cheer Team in line to receive another \$5000 and a chance to compete with only 24 other schools for national placement and an all-expense-paid opportunity to travel to a national conference



Funded by State Farm, the Project Ignition grants are managed by the National Youth Leadership Council. Shelton High School's SADD Club was a winner last year and advisor Gerry Apple and his team recently participated in an all-expense paid trip to Washington D.C. and a luncheon with US Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. SADD stands for Students Against Destructive Decisions. These girls have proven themselves to be hard workers, dedicated to the "anti texting and driving" message and reliable. They are certainly countering the stereotype that cheerleaders are pure fluff. They are making things happen, ...said Hoquiam High School Principal Jamie Huizinga.

The Cheer Team received recent media attention for an anti-texting and driving project they managed for the Washington Traffic Safety Commission. Cheerleaders developed and distributed brochures and held up big handmade banners visible to passing motorists on Riverside Avenue.



They recruited commitments from their fellow students to not text and drive and conducted other educational activities on the subject. For this they received a \$500 grant from the Commission and placement in an educational video developed by the Commission and visible on the social media site YouTube. "With this additional State Farm grant, we're taking on much more, but the basic game plan is the same, we are working to raise public awareness about the incredible dangerousness of texting and driving," said Charlotte Helland, Hoquiam Cheer Team Coach. The project is being dedicated to the memory of Enzo Williams, a Bremerton baby killed October 6, 2010 when a texting driver, Sydney Wright, slammed into a vehicle being driven by Enzo's parents. Sydney Wright is now serving time in prison for the crime and will have a felony record for life. The cheerleaders will be collaborating with the Hoquiam High School math students to conduct research to determine the extent of the texting and driving and cell phone use problem in Grays Harbor. They plan to conduct an observational survey of drivers and a knowledge and awareness survey of their fellow students and members of the community. The research will be followed by more public awareness activities, including the development of a Facebook page and a public meeting, and then more research to determine if they changed attitudes and behavior. It is easy to become complacent about texting and driving, particularly teens because texting is how they communicate. A few decades ago people didn't think drunk driving was dangerous. Well, texting and driving is

as dangerous – actually more dangerous -- than drunk driving

Helland said. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that distracted drivers cause about 5500 traffic deaths and 450,000 injuries each year and cell phone use is the biggest cause of distraction. The age group with the worst number of collisions involving distraction is the under-20 age group, distraction is implicated in 16% of all fatal crashes involving this age group. Researchers estimate that a texting driver is as dangerous as a driver with a legal blood alcohol level of .16, or twice the legal limit.



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