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NEWS LOCAL

Make sure to Y.I.E.L.D

By Votham Anastasiadis, Drayton Valley Western Review
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Two is always better than one.

Gord Cooper, the driver for the drag racing truck Smokin' Gun and a company owner in Calgary and Gord Buck, president of the Youth Initiatives and Education in Lifestyles and Driving (Y.I.E.L.D.) Association and a constable with the Stony Plain/Spruce Grove RCMP are spotted easily during their visits to Drayton Valley.

The pair found an opportunity to collaborate during Thunder in the Valley earlier this year, where Cooper says they had a great time racing against one another. Cooper says he is a new member of the association and that he's been looking to incorporate Smokin' Gun into a program just like this for some time. The two were also on hand for the inaugural Drive it Home Program put on for students of the area as part of Fire Prevention Month initiatives.

"I really enjoyed coming up to Drayton, loved Thunder in the Valley this year, it's our favourite race and we attend each year. The people are great and the crowds are always interested in what we are doing," says Cooper.

Cooper and Buck both give a chance to youth and all who are interested to race against them at the racetracks.

"We race at Castrol Raceway, just south of Edmonton almost every Friday, where they have a street legal night. Individuals can come down and race against their buddies or us," says Buck. He says there are people of all ages and vehicle types at the races.

"There are facilities for racing in Edmonton, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie and more, even if it's winter there's snowmobiling and tons of other ways for adrenaline junkies to get it out of their system," says Cooper. He says that getting it out of your system is not only possible but encouraged in many safe environments, and that people need to utilize these facilities and opportunities because it is not only their life, but other's lives who they could be affecting.

The Y.I.E.L.D. Association is made up of approximately 25 members, mostly from the Spruce Grove and the Edmonton area. Most of the members come from a variety of emergency service personnel backgrounds such as individuals from Canada Customs, the RCMP, Fire Services, EMS workers and paramedics and civilians.

The association has presented at a variety of community events and numerous schools throughout Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

In schools they usually speak to Grade 11 and Grade 12 students and at community events they speak to everyone they can.

"First of all, we get the attention of the audience with the car, then we use a variety of media such as videos and classroom instruction. We encourage questions, and we try to talk with them, and not at them in order to get the audience as engaged as possible," says Buck.

The car that is brought to the presentations is Canada's first officially recognized RCMP race car, and the youth and all who attended the recent Drive it Home Program at the MacKenzie Conference Centre, in Drayton Valley were surrounding the vehicle with dropped jaws.

"We talk about the mechanics of a collision, how they take place, why and what happens during a collision," says Buck. "... And how critical it is to stay inside the engineered life space, which is the inside of the vehicle."

The presentation/program the association shares wants youth to make appropriate and safe lifestyle choices. The program mostly touches on highway safety as well as drugs and alcohol, related to vehicle situations.

"We want to make sure people are making appropriate lifestyle choices in life and behind the wheel, a car can turn into a weapon quickly," says Buck.

"As a commercial transport driver I see texting and driving as a big thing, I can see into people's vehicles at my view and I see the impact it has on keeping focus. If individuals realized how dangerous it was, they would stop," says Cooper. "People's hands are already full with a three or four thousand pound vehicle, I'm going down with 100,000 pound loads, even an empty load is more than 60,000 pounds, and that's average around here."

Cooper says he agrees with all of the messages the Y.I.E.L.D. Association wants to portray, and that he is especially interested in participating in pushing that there are so many opportunities for street races, without endangering yourself and other innocent individuals.

"Society depends on visuals, the reaction on the students' faces are always astonishing. The videos are fairly graphic, not blood and guts, but those who have seen us know what happens to a body that gets hit going 70 kilometres per hour."

Buck says the purpose of the presentation is to save lives and that statistically someone dies each weekend in a street race - this isn't including deaths in injuries due to poor decisions behind the wheel.

"Street racing is now a criminal offence, we want youth to have a positive interaction with the police, and hopefully that relationship will continue on in other situations. I have more fun with the kids than at the race track, because of the instant reaction," says Buck.

He says that speed and inexperience have been leading factors in countless collisions and that the youth as well as the parents have to take some responsibility and educate each other on making crucial decisions when behind the wheel.

"Unfortunately, many people in their youth feel like they are invincible, time and time again they are proving that this is not the case," says Buck. "If you can press 3,900 pounds then you can get away with not wearing a seatbelt, those are some of the physics involved with just a simple roll over."

Buck says the Y.I.E.L.D. program gives the youth something to think about, and that students have approached him with positive changes they plan on making, after learning the facts about a collision. At the end of the presentation, the audience is given a challenge, it is to take a body part and strap it up so the participant cannot use it.

"They get an idea of how important each body part is. I've heard many say that they resented wearing a seatbelt because it's the law, but once they understand the reasoning they are more inclined to and even want to," says Buck.

Both Cooper and Buck will be at Thunder in the Valley next year, and are looking forward to it.

Buck says that the RCMP are always looking for different ways to reach out to the youth, and that partnering with the association allows for the RCMP to have a voice on the forefront as well as give the youth an opportunity to speak to officers in a manner that is not always possible; a one on one discussion with common ground.

The Y.I.E.L.D. Association hopes to be in town again for a community event before that. The association is a non-profit organization, which Buck says is not funded by tax dollars or with any agency, so it is limited to where and when it can travel.

The association is working on a few capital projects started/starting and hope for corporate partnerships to step forward.

To contact or to schedule the association for a visit to a school or community event please contact the RCMP in the desired jurisdiction to contact further or the Stony Plain detachment, where Buck works.

For more information on the Y.I.E.L.D. Association please search them on Facebook.

Cooper brings a Smokin' Gun presentation/program to youth throughout the province, this year he has dedicated it to showing support to the Canadian Forces, RCMP and every organization or group that faces danger for society.

The program did its first air show this summer, Cooper says it was amazing and they got a photo opportunity that was very rare because of their efforts in showing support to the people that keep our society safe.

"We always need to be showing appreciation for these people, and remind people what they have done, and are currently doing for us. We are limited to the opportunities to do that and this is one way we can give back to the community too, as well as working with the RCMP and students," says Cooper.

For more information on the places Smokin' Gun has been and message it has been giving please visit

www.smokingunracing.com.