

## A New Course on Campus: AA 101 California school takes the pledge

At first glance, the wealthy Los Angeles suburb of Pacific Palisades seems an idyllic community of winding roads and ocean-view estates. But in the last 16 months it has been the setting for tragedy. Ten young residents have died violently, many in incidents involving alcohol or drugs. Just last month four teenagers were killed in a fiery crash when their speeding car struck a light pole on a main boulevard, veered across the median strip and hit a tree. The driver, 17-year-old Russell Kantor, was reported to have a blood alcohol level of .08 percent, just below the state's .10 criterion for drunk driving.

While many in the community mourn the deaths, Palisades High School psychologist Linda Levine decided to start what is believed to be the country's first high-school chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous. "I think some students have decided that one way to memorialize the kids who died would be to get sober in their honor," says Levine. "There's an instinct to try to keep this thing from having been totally in vain."

**Getting clean.** The high school already has 19 different organizations aimed at students with substance abuse problems, including a lunchtime support group for expatriates of hospital treatment programs and a mandatory program after school for students caught using or carrying drugs. Palisades High also has a two-year-old chapter of Alateen, for those with alcoholic relatives and friends. But Levine felt kind needed more. "How do you tell your dad you want to go clean," she says, "If you've never confessed

that you're not clean?" The school, following the A.A. credo of anonymity for participants, allows students to go to once-a-week sessions without informing their parents, and no records are kept. Levine's only role is to unlock a classroom door and let A.A. leaders in. About 10 youngsters are attending now, she says, and the turnout increases every week.

In 1977, Palisades High caught the nation's attention as the subject of the best-selling book, "What Really Happened to the Class of '65?", a case study of the pressures of growing up in a rich community. Young inexperienced drivers operating fast cars, late-night parties where alcohol and drugs are used, a lack of parental supervision - these are the facts of life in well-to-do communities across the country. Many residents think these are the factors behind the recent spate of fatalities in Pacific Palisades, where the median house price is \$660,000. Despite the A.A. program's initial success, some Palisades residents think the drinking problem won't improve without parental involvement. One mother, who didn't want her name used, says many parents feel they've done enough if they hire a driver for their kids on prom night. Her son's best friend was killed in a collision a year ago. "I think the adults are very aggressive and very successful and very much on the fast track," she says. "these kids have a lot to live up to."

The A.A. chapter isn't the only new anti-drinking initiative in the Palisades. A representative of Mothers Against Drunk Driving will speak to the students next month and bring along Russell

Kantor's demolished car as dramatic evidence. "Somehow we have to get across to the young people here that it's not a question of not drinking and driving," says Parent Teacher Student Association

copresident Sally Lorillo, "It's a question of not drinking."

Barbara Kantrowitz with  
Jeanne Gordon in Los Angeles

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