

Lecturer denounces "scare 'em" tactics

By MICHAEL KESTON
Of the Emerald

Mark Miller strides briskly out of the small, shack-like building which houses the Drug Information Center (DIC), handing me a motorcycle helmet as he starts up his Yamaha 650. "Vrrrooommm!" Helmets in place, we're on our way, wheeling through Eugene traffic on a clear, brisk winter day. We're headed for Horizons, Eugene's alternative high school, where Miller will deliver the first in a series of eight hourly sessions on dealing with today's ever-increasing drug technology.

Once at Horizons, Miller doesn't waste any time getting on with his class. As the sole lecturer provided by the DIC, he has a busy schedule to keep. After this class is completed, he will zip over to the state motor pool where he'll pick up a Pinto to drive to Roseburg. There, he'll give his presentation to a group that night. The next morning will find the 25 year-old drug technologist in front of a classroom at South Eugene High at 8:50 a.m.

His two-hour lecture, entitled "Drug Dynamics" is delivered to every Health 150 and 250 class on campus. Besides lecturing to schools and other groups, he instructs 12 police training sessions around the state in the use of drugs.

Although only a few students are present in the Horizons classroom as Miller begins, more wander in during the lecture and stay — their attention riveted to the curly-haired person pacing in front of the blackboard in frayed

jeans and thick-heeled boots. The young students are surprised to hear an older person talk to them frankly about drugs and their bodies. "The Fonz" of drug technology, Miller tells his listeners that if they end up victims of drug abuse after being through his class they are "fools" or worse, "nerds."

"At the beginning of a class I can almost divide the room between straights and stoners."

He says people get hurt with drugs because they have not been taught how to use them. "The only education we have in any of the schools to prepare our young citizens to deal with the massive number of drugs out there is we talk about illegal drugs and there we usually give biased facts, misinformation, inaccurate statements...in short, we try to scare 'em," says Miller.

Miller asserts that scare tactics haven't worked with the drug abuse problem that now faces society and that's where the Drug Information Center comes in. The DIC has access to professional consultants and computer lines to ob-

tain the latest data. Reliable, up-to-date information on literally hundreds of thousands of drugs is gathered and maintained in the center's extensive library, which is available to the public as are several publications put out by the DIC. People can call in for information or ask for a speaker or class for a specific group. The anonymous, over the telephone (686-5411) drug analysis service offered by the center informs people about just what they're putting into their bodies as well as informing the center itself on what's going around these days.

The DIC started out five years ago as a student idea and has since grown into a well-respected information and referral service that is now affiliated with the University's health education department. The DIC is also a member of the national Drug Abuse Communications Network (DRACON), making it the primary source for drug information in the state.

The financial rewards, however, are not great. While the center gathers its funds from a variety of federal, state and local sources, Miller gets by on \$100 a month he receives for teaching a course at the University. At the last state legislative session, the Human Resources Committee unanimously passed Senate Bill 819 which appropriated \$280,000 to the center to cover the DIC's costs for such things as a proposed toll-free WATS line for state-wide utilization of DIC services. The bill did not become a reality, being tabled in deference to other issues. The present Legis-

lature could be the scene of another lobbying effort by the DIC. Miller estimates the center reaches between 600 to 2,000 clients with its services each month, depending on the season. "When mushrooms were happening, we had people lined up outside the door at 9 a.m. holding their bags of mushrooms up in the air, waiting to have them identified," he says.

When most people think of drugs in relation to the DIC they think of the illicit or so-called hard drugs and Miller says he feels that's unfortunate. "These (the illicit drugs) do exist, but they're only a small part of the entire technology. There are thousands of prescription drugs, a hundred thousand over the counter drugs in drug stores. There are com-



Photo by Patti McNabb

Mark Miller, "The Fonz" of drug technology, travels throughout the Eugene area daily lecturing to classes and groups about drug use and the Drug Information Center.

mercial drugs that people get in the food, the water, and the air.

There are recreational drugs which people are normally surprised to hear, but alcohol is a recreational drug; coffee, nicotine — all are. For every single illicit drug you can think of there are 216 legal drugs you may end up using," he says.

No matter how straight people may think they are, sooner or later they're going to come in contact with one or another drug, yet they will have practically no skills to help them deal with that experience when it happens. Miller describes our current predicament with drugs as culture shock or future shock. In short, a technology that's completely ahead of people's abilities to deal with it.

He compared drugs to another form of technology — the automobile. "You put somebody behind the wheel of an automobile and you're going to have an accident. We do exactly the same with drugs in our society. We say, 'Here, take the drug.' We don't teach you how to drive it."

The present shroud of mystery and ignorance which surrounds our use of drugs can be changed, Miller says, ideally with an education program which would start in the third, fifth, seventh and eleventh grades with a gradual introduction to the drug technology.

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As students reach the higher grades, they'd be given more information, teaching them to be more responsible.

Miller sees such a mass education program as imperative in light of the increased possibility for change in our drug laws as they now stand. "One of the problems people have to recognize, whether they agree with it or not, is that current drug laws are scientifically inaccurate. Furthermore, a significant minority of the population is stating that these laws have no right to be enforced on them, that they violate the Second and Fourteenth Amendments to pur-

suit of happiness and privacy.

"Sooner or later these drug laws are going to change and we're going to need some kind of response to them. What are we going to do in our society when we make one more drug available that no one's been taught how to use properly?" Miller asks.

Well, until things change we'll probably continue to rely on Mark Miller and his small group of dedicated colleagues over at the DIC to educate the entire state. Miller encourages people to call DIC at 686-5411 to have any drug evaluated in order to experience more responsible, safer use of it.

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