



GLENN RUSSELL, Free Press

Steven Guyette, 17, of Burlington finishes a cigarette Tuesday on Church Street. Guyette, who said he had just listened to Rob Williams' presentation at Burlington High School, has been smoking for about a year and started because his friends smoke. He said he wants to quit but feels that he is addicted to cigarettes.

BHS students learn how media markets cigarettes, alcohol to kids

By Jill Fahy

Free Press Staff Writer

Ryan Atwood saunters out into the night air and reaches into his pocket for a pack of smokes. The teen rebel fires one up with a flick of his Zippo and catches a glimpse of seductive brunette Marissa Cooper.

"Can I bum a cigarette?" Cooper asks, emerging from the shadows.

The teenagers light up off each other's smoke, sharing an intimate moment.

Laughter tittered through the Burlington High School auditorium Tuesday as the scene from the popular television series "The OC" was presented for some 500 juniors and seniors.

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"This is one minute ... in which we're walking an 8- to 12-year-old audience through how to use a cancer stick socially."

Rob Williams, Champlain College professor on a TV smoking scene

eternity in television, in which we're walking an 8- to 12-year-old audience through how to use a cancer stick socially," said Rob Williams, a Champlain College professor and local media educator. "It's called product placement, where products are written into story lines of TV shows."

Williams used more than a half-dozen examples and a healthy dose of humor to show students how corporate marketers of alcohol and tobacco products

use the media to sell kids on drinking and smoking. BHS' student prevention group — Friends of Zeus — sponsored the program as part of the high school's annual drug awareness day.

Williams travels to dozens of Vermont schools each year to put media education on the map.

"How many of you read 'Glamour' magazine?" Williams asked students, who answered with a few raised hands.

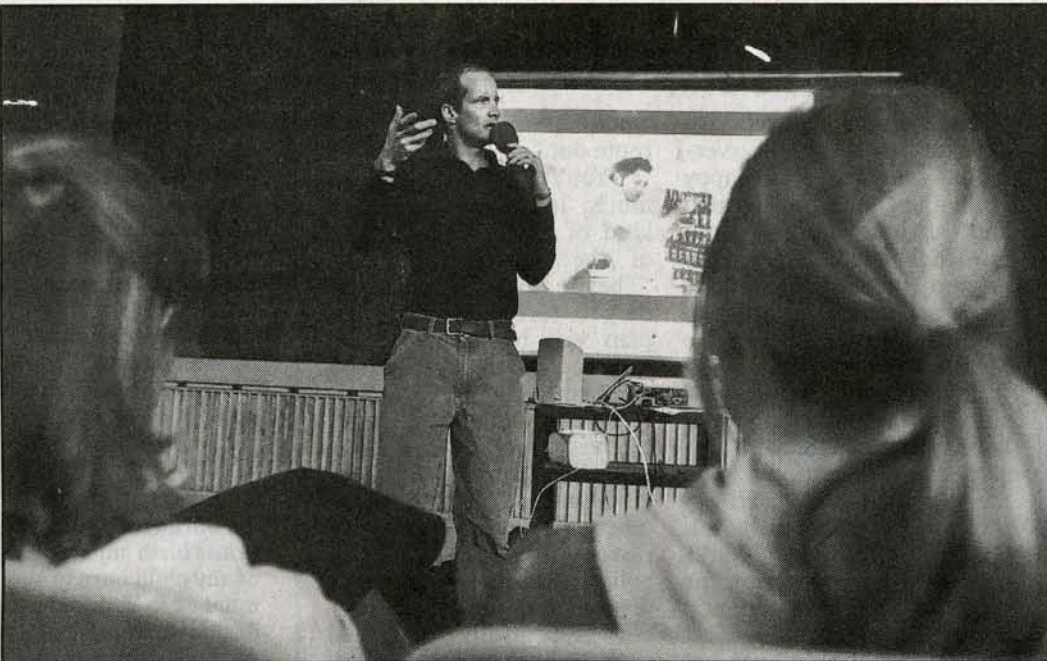
He showed the group an

article on the health page, in which the author writes about the negative effects of alcoholic drinks on the body. More prominent on the page, however, is a large picture of a blond female college student holding an enticing, gooey blender drink. The article also includes large, colorful graphics of different types of drinks.

"Which are you likely to remember more, the printed words or pictures of alcohol?" Williams asked the crowd. "This is not a 'let's all be fit and healthy together' story. This is alcohol propaganda."

In his presentation, Williams interspersed a number of sobering facts on

See **MEDIA**, 3B



GLENN RUSSELL, *Free Press*

Rob Williams, a professor of media studies at Champlain College, tells students at Burlington High School on Tuesday how cigarette and alcohol industries use the media to convince young people to use their products.

MEDIA: BHS students learn about alcohol, tobacco marketing

Continued from Page 1B

alcohol and tobacco use among young children. In the United States, he said, 1,200 smokers die each day. As many as 750 Vermonters die each year from smoking-related disease.

Williams also pointed out the effectiveness of target marketing on kids. He said research shows that 990 of 1,000 8-year-olds can identify the Budweiser logo when it is shown to them.

After the program, a group of BHS seniors weighed in on Williams' presentation. Senior Mollie Campbell said she was amazed that young children can be so influenced by the

media. They also were impressed with Williams' ability to make what he presented interesting and funny.

Williams said injecting humor into his program is a must.

"You've got to make people laugh every five or six minutes," Williams joked. "To be an effective educator, in an age of entertainment, you must also entertain."

Just as important, he said, is to disseminate basic media facts and try to get kids "off the couch" and involved whenever possible. He said his latest project involved creating an anti-smoking commercial, called "Butts of Hollywood," with Concord High School students.

Sarah Maher, a senior at BHS, said she liked the fact that Williams' presentation was informative without being preachy.

"It helps you realize what kind of stuff they're putting out there for young kids," Maher said.

Williams said he wants students to walk away from his programs with information they can use to make healthy choices and to be more aware and wiser about the impact the media have on their lives.

"It's not about demonizing media," Williams said, "it's about recognizing the ends to which they are put."

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