

NEWS

He's fighting the war on drugs with extreme sports athletes

By Erin Spry

LA JOLLA LIGHT

It's been a long time since the television ads with an egg and frying pan: "This is your brain on drugs." Since breakfast foods are no longer preaching anti-drug messages, kids today need something else to get them thinking.

La Jolla resident Jon Sundt is dedicated to providing just that.

Sundt is the founder of the Sundt Memorial Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to educating kids about the benefits of avoiding drugs. He started the foundation 10 years ago, after losing both of his brothers to drug use. The anti-drug message is one that hits home for him, and he is passionate about his mission.

"I want to change the hearts and minds of kids," he said, "and how they perceive their choices when it comes to drugs."

The foundation has produced two anti-drug videos, featuring extreme sports athletes who choose a clean lifestyle. The first, "A Natural High: Riding the Drug-Free Wave," was produced in 1998 and was distributed to 5,000 schools.

The new video, "Natural High 2," is ready to be sent to even more schools. Hosted by skateboarding champion Tony Hawk, the video presents athletes skilled in everything from surfing to rock climbing.

"We know kids are tremendously influenced by their peers," said Sundt. "At a certain point in a kid's life, unfortunately, parents become less important

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of the fast-paced sports in the video. He said marketing the anti-drug message this way allows kids to relate to the athletes without feeling lectured.

"The kids tend to put up a guard against information that comes out that way," he said, "and this is getting in underneath their cool radar, because it's being delivered by heroes."



SUNDT

Crystal Trull, the executive director of the Sundt Memorial Foundation, said they're making an effort to get the video

out to every public and private school in the nation, thus reaching more than 31 million students.

"Everywhere it's sent, they usually show it," said Trull. "We've gotten calls from all over, saying, 'Can you send us this video? We've heard about it and we want to show it.'"

Trull said the target audience for this video is middle school and high school

children. She said the mission of the foundation is prevention through education, and providing role models for kids. "It's not to tell them what they can and cannot do, but to inspire them to think about their potential. Substance abuse will steer them away from that."

The video presents a positive side to being drug-free, but also shows the negative side. At the end of the video, Sundt talks about the loss of his brothers.

Trull said kids should know both sides of the story, since choosing to do drugs can have those kind of devastating ramifications.

"It's avoidable," she said. "It's not a disease. It's not something that just happens to people. They make choices to act that way, and we want to do something to help somebody not make that choice."

The foundation also has a Web site, www.drugfreewave.com, with resources, video clips and related links. They offer discussion guides for parents or teachers, designed to open up further conversation after watching the video.

Sundt said they have piles of letters expressing support. Barry McCaffrey,

the former director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, is a proud supporter of the video.

"If you show your kids only one substance abuse prevention video this year, make it 'Natural High 2,'" said McCaffrey. "Your young people will remember."

Sundt said they get a lot of support from La Jolla as well. He has lived in the Jewel for 25 years where he runs a hedge fund consulting firm and is raising a 5-year-old daughter with his wife, Kathlene.

"We're a small, homegrown foundation," he said. "We live off the support and sweat of the local community and my friends."

The foundation's yearly fund-raiser is on Saturday, Sept. 18. They are trying to raise enough money to cover the \$5 per school it costs to give the videos away.

Sundt is confident they will make a difference if they can reach enough kids.

"We're a small organization that can have a national impact," he said. "That's pretty amazing."

To attend the fund-raiser, call (858) 551-7006.