

Guest Column by Chief Dennis R. Naylor
Success and Well Wishes for the Graduating High School Class

With the end of the school year in sight, the senior high school students have reached a tremendous milestone in their lives; a milestone in which endless possibilities and opportunities exist. For some, graduation from high school equates to a transition to college, for others it means service to our country, and for others it means entry into the workforce. Regardless of which option is selected, life will be a new adventure for this year's graduating class. As all of these possibilities lie ahead, history has shown us that for some unfortunate graduates, tragedy may lie in wait. A year has not gone by where we haven't learned about a young adult whose life has ended far too early because of a car crash, an unintended alcohol or drug overdose, or some other preventable incident. If it's predictable, it's preventable so let's do everything we can to prevent further tragedies.

In law enforcement, our foremost goal is to keep the public safe, and many times this includes keeping people safe from themselves. If you are reading this article then you can help us to achieve this goal. Remind the young adults who you know that motor vehicle accidents claim thousands of lives every year. The causation factors for many deadly car crashes are speed, alcohol, driver distraction, and a lack of seatbelts. As much as this is an exciting time in the lives of the graduating class, they still have to remember that they are not invincible. A car crash can be very unforgiving so let's think about ways to put the odds in your favor as much as possible as you travel.

When driving, focus on the task at hand which is operating the vehicle. Texting, talking on the phone, and goofing around with friends in the car can cause enough of a distraction to create a serious accident. Waiting until you are at your destination to do those things significantly reduces your chances of getting into an accident. Speed limits exist for safety reasons so please obey them, and even if you are traveling within the speed limit, wear a seat belt. The two seconds that it takes to put on a seatbelt can be the difference between life and death if an accident were to occur- even a low speed accident. Lastly, it goes without saying that drinking underage is illegal and more importantly drinking and driving can easily be deadly. The horrific images that occur in fatal motor vehicle accidents would be a sufficient means to deter anyone from drinking and driving.

If you are a parent and you're hosting a party to celebrate a graduate's success, don't serve alcohol to those under 21. It's against the law and more importantly it can have tragic consequences. Many times, adults feel that they can better monitor their kids and their kid's friends if they drink with them. This isn't true and inevitably, someone can slip through the cracks and hurt themselves or someone else as a result. When law enforcement officers arrest someone for driving while intoxicated, they ask the arrestee where they had last been drinking. If it's determined that a parent served someone under 21, they can be charged with unlawfully dealing with a child, which is a crime and also hold responsibility for civil lawsuits that could result. The bottom line is that it's just not worth it.

As law enforcement officers, we see the things that the rest of society does not. If we can keep people from becoming statistics, then we have done our jobs well. I wish the graduating class of 2013 a great future and great success. I've found that success comes from a combination of hard work, good choices, and a little bit of luck. We can't control the luck, but we can control our

work ethic and the choices we make. Seniors: Work hard & make wise choices and you can accomplish anything you want. Best of luck to the class of 2013!

"It is the mission of the Oneonta Police Department to provide professional services with integrity and dedication, to preserve life, to enforce the law, and to work in partnership with the community to enhance the quality of life in the City of Oneonta."

