

THE CHARGER

EDITORIAL Speaker not worth controversy

Controversy struck Wabaunsee High School after several Wabaunsee County organizations paid and hosted self-proclaimed teen violence expert Phil Chalmers to speak at a student assembly.

Seniors attended his previous presentation in 2013, and other students heard opinions on how the last presentation was inappropriate for a high school environment.

WHS students and faculty were told Phil Chalmers' presentation would cover prevention of and protection from school shootings, but he only discussed the mass murderers he has interviewed and spoke briefly on the warning signs of a school shooter.

Chalmers also told students prior to the assembly he would make time for questions after he finished presenting, but deliberately skipped over a "Questions" slide in the presentation. He then rushed backstage after concluding the assembly, making himself unavailable to students.

During the assembly, Chalmers did indeed give small amounts of information on topics like underage drinking and suicide but consistently cut the information short, referring instead to his books and movies for more guidance. He was promoting his work, rather than giving students more information on issues.

When speaking about suicide and suicidal thoughts, there was no mention for sources of help or suicide lines. He only gave himself and his wife as a support source. When several WHS students sent an email to his public account, they all received the same generic email stating he did not "have any more time to respond to these inquiries." Then he again referenced his books "Inside the Mind of a Teen Killer" and "True Lies."

In a time to connect with students who were interested about his published works, he behaved unprofessionally. During an interview with Charger reporters, Chalmers cursed and threatened that he "would sue anyone else who made a post or wrote a newspaper article about him." Chalmers threatened not only a staff member, but also students and community members.

Chalmers also commented on Mission Valley's decision not to attend his presentation. "The school that didn't come, that's terrible. Those students didn't get to hear this," he said, "and if something bad happens there, there's blood on somebody's hands and it's not mine. So I'll be watching that school for the next year."

The Charger staff believes that Mission Valley made the right choice in opting out of the assembly. While the presentation itself wasn't offensive, Chalmers' lecture was common sense. We knew drugs are bad and to kick and scream when someone tries to abduct us. We did not need someone like Phil Chalmers to get paid to pass on a handful of cliches.

The editorial is the opinion of the Charger staff. Send letters to the editor to whscharger@gmail.com.

Students have mixed reaction to speaker

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Television personality and author Phil Chalmers visited Wabaunsee High School to speak to students about a variety of dangers students face.

The Wabaunsee County Sheriff Department invited Chalmers to speak to Wabaunsee County students September 19.

Chalmers, a self-proclaimed expert on teen killers, said he has been giving talks on teen violence to students, administrators and law enforcement officers across the country for 33 years. Chalmers interviews convicted teen killers and uses their stories to present information regarding what factors create a teen killer to others. His appearance cost \$2,500, paid for by the City of Alma, the County Sheriff's Office and County Attorney's Office.

WHS students were required to attend the talk unless their parents signed a written permission slip opting their child out. Before the assembly, WHS Principal Jan Hutley urged students to have an open mind.

Chalmers' student presentation, titled "True Lies," focused on "lies of our culture that are killing this generation." Topics included hazards such as using drugs and alcohol to make life more exciting, sexting and using violence to solve problems. Chalmers cited bullying as a large cause of teen violence. He also discussed drunk driving, cutting and suicide.

The presentation was illustrated by photos and video clips, as well as some humor. One of the goals of his talk was "to really get students to think about the decisions they're making that could be dangerous and fatal, whether it be drugs, drunk driving, getting an STD



Speaker Phil Chalmers uses freshman Lauren Schutter to demonstrate how to fight back if you're being kidnapped in a presentation to WHS students September 19. "It was uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable when a stranger touches you in general," Schutter said. "I think girls are more likely to be kidnapped for obvious reasons." Photo by Laurel Barber.

and those decisions that people make that could be life-changing," Chalmers said. He stressed the importance of speaking up and telling someone if you believe something is wrong.

The students had a mixed response to Chalmers' presentation. "I thought it was great, professional and entertaining," senior Jarett Bolinder said. "He didn't say anything controversial to the students."

Other students were less impressed. "It felt like he was scared of something going wrong if he went on too long or if he let anyone say anything," senior Dillon Spellman said.

The presentation for parents later in the evening struck a different tone. While still interjected with humor, some of the content was much more graphic and intense. Chalmers discussed warning signs of a teen killer and steps that could be taken to ensure the safety of schools and families.

The talk focused heavily on "teen culture" and its effects on the minds of teenagers. He played clips of the game "Grand Theft Auto V" and a 21 Savage music video, "All the Smoke," which depicted a beheading.

The following day, Chalmers conducted an all-day training session in the WHS auditorium for law enforcement. Students were not allowed to attend.

Chalmers spoke at WHS five years ago. His return sparked some controversy in the community. Brendan Praeger, a WHS teacher who was present for Chalmers' previous talk, wrote a letter to The Wabaunsee County Signal-Enterprise expressing concern over comments made by Chalmers that he viewed as racist and sexist.

"The decision to bring him back reflects poorly on the school, the sheriff department and the community as a whole," Praeger wrote.

Sheriff Rob Hoskins responded to the letter on Facebook, stating "I

hope that members of our county will take the time to come to this event and listen and then form their own opinions."

Although Mission Valley High School originally intended to come to the presentation, Mission Valley staff discussed the situation and decided not to attend the event. Mission Valley Superintendent Bill Clark said that the decision was "best for USD 330 given all the different factors that had to be evaluated to make the decision in the short time frame that existed."

Chalmers discussed his opinion on Mission Valley's decision in a student-conducted interview following his presentation to WHS students.

"The school that didn't come, that's terrible. Those students didn't get to hear this," Chalmers said, "and if something bad happens there, there's blood on somebody's hands and it's not mine. So I'll be watching that school for the next year."

Former WHS principal Bryson dies

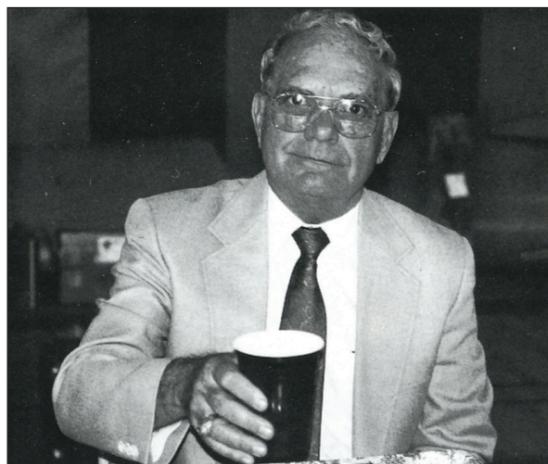
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Arlon Bryson, former WHS principal, passed away September 18.

Bryson worked at WHS from 1984-92 out of his 42 years in the field of education. According to those who worked with him, he was a caring man, a huge supporter for teachers, fair to his students and well thought of in the community.

Bryson was always encouraging his students, including former principal Jeff Stuewe. "He was one of the nicest guys I've ever met," Stuewe said, "And he did a lot and really encouraged me when I was going into teaching." He said Bryson was the type of person that you would run into randomly and spend some time catching up.

Current principal Jan Hutley was also a student of Bryson's and said she will remember his caring and kind demeanor. "His personality conveyed a level of thoughtfulness for his students that ensured we never questioned his want for our success in school and in life," Hutley said.



Former WHS principal Arlon Bryson as pictured in the 1992 Charger yearbook. When retiring, Bryson said "I am pleased to finish my administrative career at WHS. I've found my job to be very rewarding."

Not only did his students enjoy him, his staff was very appreciative of him. "He was the principal who hired me," FCS teacher Diane Breiner said. "I'll always be grateful for that." Aside from Bryson's wife's breakfast casserole at faculty meetings, Breiner's favorite memory of him is on the day of her interview when she went in and was given the job on the spot.

The 1992 Charger yearbook is dedicated to Mr. Bryson. In a message at the end, students wrote "Mr.

Bryson has always put the WHS students first and was always willing to lend his support. Mr. Bryson has given of himself to the students and teachers. We will miss his guidance and leadership."

Bryson was buried Monday at Wamego City Cemetery. Memorials may be given to Wamego Public Library or the First United Methodist Church, and left in care of Stewart Funeral Home of Wamego.

The Charger Staff

The Charger is an open forum for student free speech.

Send letters to the editor, story ideas or pictures to whscharger@gmail.com or The Charger, Wabaunsee High School, 912 Missouri, Alma, KS 66401, Phone: (785) 765-3315

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