

## La Porte County

### Herald-Argus

#### A dose of reality

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#### **Woman whose son died of overdose is hoping to bring attention to drug addiction in the county**

MICHIGAN CITY -- La Porte County resident Beth Safirt knows all too well the pain of losing a son to a drug overdose. Now she hopes the organization she's starting can prevent other parents from going through a similar tragedy.

Safirt lost her son, Brandon Benner, to an accidental drug overdose on June 2, just 13 days before his 19th birthday.

On Tuesday, N.O.P.E. La Porte County held a candlelight vigil in Washington Park to remember those who have died from drug- and alcohol-related incidents, and to let parents know help is available.

"We decided to start a chapter of N.O.P.E. in La Porte County because of Brandon's death and so many other deaths due to overdose in La Porte County," Safirt told The La Porte County Herald-Argus. "We felt it was a much-needed program to inform not only our children but their parents about the dangers of street drugs and prescription drugs. We chose N.O.P.E. because they share a lot of the same goals and interests we do." N.O.P.E., based in West Palm Beach, Fla., stands for Narcotic Overdose Prevention and Education.

"At the cornerstone of N.O.P.E.'s mission is a personal, high-impact presentation delivered to middle and high school students throughout the school year," Pastor Jason Safirt, who is no relation to Beth, told the nearly 60 people gathered. The presentation, he said, is delivered from the perspectives of law enforcement officials; representatives from the judicial system; recovering addicts; and parents whose children have died from overdoses. "The presentation is meant to invoke emotions and demand the attention of students," Jason said. "The school presentations achieve an immediate and positive result from the students."

"One in four individuals have been affected by drug illness, drug death, drug use, alcohol abuse. One out of every four in this country," Herb Higgin, of Safe Harbor, told the crowd, his words almost as brisk as the cold air off the lake. "I went to Google on the Internet and I put in 'parents dealing with drug overdose.' There are 449,000 Web sites and articles." But, Higgin said, there is hope and help. "Drug addiction is a treatable illness if you intercede. You have to intercede or it could be fatal," said Higgin, who has a master's degree in health sciences with a concentration in addiction studies.

But the road to recovery can be hard at times, Beth told the crowd. "Addiction to drugs is a horrible thing to overcome. Much harder than I ever knew. Harder than Brandon ever imagined. You become a slave to it. It controls you. You do not control it. Don't be fooled into thinking this couldn't happen to you," she said. "There is nothing I can do to bring Brandon back, but I can make sure his death was not in vein by sharing his story," Beth said. "Hopefully, by hearing his story, young people realize the dangers they face by using drugs."

Spreading the word is exactly what N.O.P.E. intends to do.

"Everybody feels this is much needed in the community. A lot of people don't want to face just how bad the problem is in La Porte County," said Kim Wallace, Beth's sister.

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#### **Help is available**

N.O.P.E. Task Force: 561-478-1055, [www.nopetaskforce.org](http://www.nopetaskforce.org)

Anonymous online chat: [www.hanleycenter.org/nope](http://www.hanleycenter.org/nope)

La Porte County chapter's e-mail: [nope\\_laporte@comcast.net](mailto:nope_laporte@comcast.net)