

## Loss of son spurs anti-drug message

MARION – When Mount Vernon resident Dave Culbertson’s son Greg died of a heroin overdose in 2009, such deaths weren’t making the headlines. There weren’t words attached like “epidemic.”

It did appear in the newspaper that week, however, as Culbertson did what was then unheard of and included the drug overdose as the cause of death in Greg’s obituary. He decided that wasn’t the end of his speaking out about the dangers of heroin abuse.

Culbertson, seven years later, continues his mission to talk to students at schools including Marion Harding High School about the dangers of drugs. That message now includes not only heroin but prescription opiate painkillers like Percocet that are becoming among the most widely abused drugs.

Culbertson recently returned to Harding where students engaged in Teen Institute are preparing to attend an anti-drug rally in Columbus.

“He just does a nice job of relating to the kids,” said Harding health teacher John Godfrey.

Culbertson, in his message, talks about the dangers of drug abuse and shares the story of his son’s life and death. He urges students to make positive decisions and to find their passions in life while avoiding an addiction that for many turns fatal.

“Drugs don’t care who they kill,” he said. “Neither do drug dealers. There are always more kids to drag into it.”

Culbertson’s organization is named Arms of an Angel Foundation. More information is located on its website at [www.armsofanangel.org](http://www.armsofanangel.org).

“That’s our family ministry now,” said Culbertson, whose wife Ellen helps behind the scenes. “It’s my release. I feel like he (Greg) is there with me doing it. It’s just a passion. We care about kids.”

He talked about how society’s seeing heroin, which once waned as the drug of choice, come “back with a vengeance.”

“I feel like I’m walking up a fast downhill escalator,” he said. “I hope if I touch one person his short life was worthwhile.”

Culbertson’s visit is among different annual activities Godfrey plans to educate students about the dangers of drugs.

Like Culbertson, Godfrey, who’s taught health at Harding for 18 years, said he’s alarmed about the spike in heroin use in recent years. He said he will include more information about opiate addiction into his curriculum next school year as required by state law.

Students in Harding’s chapter of Teen Institute, which Godfrey advises, will take part in a drug-free rally to be held in May at the Ohio Statehouse. The Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network, the Drug Free Action Alliance and several state agencies are organizing the rally.

Teen Institute also hosts other activities throughout the school year including an anti-drunk driving presentation before the high school prom.

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Dave Culbertson, whose son died of a heroin overdose, talks to Harding High School students on April 5 about the dangers of heroin and prescription painkiller abuse.