

## Raising awareness about drugged driving

February 7, 2018 By [Kevin Weiss](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

A case of drugged driving forever changed the lives of parents Joey and Tammy Leonard.

Now their mission is to ensure other families don't experience the same anguish they must handle every day.

On Oct. 12, 2015, the Leonards lost their daughter, Kassidy Leonard, her husband, William Griggs, and their 12-day-old baby granddaughter, Kimberlynn Dawn Griggs, after a horrific head-on collision with an impaired driver in Tennessee.

The driver, Benjamin Franklin, then 28, had crossed over the road into the oncoming lanes and struck Grigg's vehicle on State Highway 13 in Houston County, Tennessee.

The young family was instantly killed.

Franklin, who was under the influence of oxycodone, methamphetamine and amphetamines at the time of the crash, survived.

He was later sentenced to 36 years in prison for vehicular homicide.

"We say we received a life sentence, because of a senseless, preventable act of a grown man. It's difficult for us to understand," said Joey Leonard, associate dean of academic affairs and retention services at PHSC's East Campus.

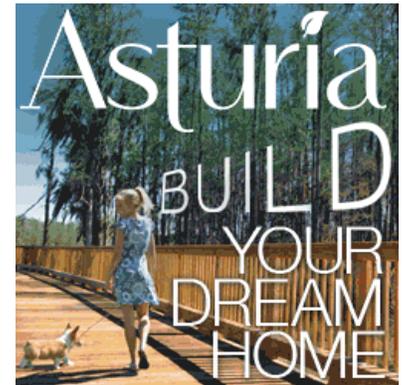
The Leonards shared their personal story during a panel discussion on drugged driving prevention at the Pasco-Hernando State College East Campus in Dade City.

Topics centered on the consequences of impaired driving, along with the risks of illegal and prescription drug use while operating a motor vehicle. Law enforcement and medical professionals weighed in.

The Jan. 30 event was part of the college's ongoing Community Awareness Series available to community members, students, faculty and staff.

### The issues

The National Institute of Drug Abuse says the use of illicit drugs or misuse of prescription drugs can



### SEARCH



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Kassidy Leonard, her husband, William Griggs, and their 12-day-old baby daughter, Kimberlynn Dawn Griggs, were killed by a drug impaired driver in October 2015. Kassidy's parents, Joey and Tammy Leonard, shared their personal story during a driving prevention seminar at the Pasco-Hernando State College East Campus in Dade City. (Courtesy of Joey and Tammy Leonard)

make driving a car unsafe — just like driving after drinking alcohol — putting the driver, passengers and others who share the road at risk.

The effects of specific drugs differ depending on how they act in the brain, according to the organization.

For example, marijuana can slow reaction time, impair judgment of time and distance, and decrease coordination. Drivers who have used cocaine or methamphetamine can be aggressive and reckless when driving. Certain kinds of sedatives, called benzodiazepines, can cause dizziness and drowsiness.

Drugged driving is widespread nationally.

According to the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 11.8 million people age 16 drove under the influence of illicit drugs in 2016, the latest data published on the topic.

Approximately 21 percent of the 31,666 fatal crashes in the U.S., in 2015 involved at least one driver who tested positive for drugs after the incident, according to federal data released to USA TODAY and interviews with leaders in the field.

In Florida, there were 281 drug-related crash fatalities in 2015. That figure has risen every year since 2010, when 109 drug-related crash fatalities reported.

Panelists extensively pinpointed the use of marijuana.

Each warned students about the risks, especially when operating a vehicle.

"Marijuana alters your judgment, and it's something you shouldn't be doing before you get behind the wheel of a car," said panelist Jessica Boh, who's in her final year at the University of Florida's College of Pharmacy.

Pasco Sheriff deputy Barry Nixon, another panelist, many times has witnessed the effects of those driving under the influence of marijuana.

Nixon explained many of his marijuana-related DUI arrests have been those traveling over 100 miles per hour, usually in a 45 mph zone.

"When you smoke marijuana, your heart rate goes up, your pulse goes up," Nixon said.

"The impairment effects can last in your body for 24 hours. Just like with pain medication or anything, you don't know how long it's going to affect you or what it's going to do. .... You don't know what it does for you."

Recreational drugs aren't the only problems, however.

Drugged driving can also extend to over-the-counter medications and prescription medications, Boh explained.

"The reality is, any medication can affect your ability to drive," she said.

Her advice is to read prescription labels and consult a pharmacist on how different drugs can affect driving and how it may interact with other medications.

"It's your responsibility to know whether or not those medications impair you," Boh said.

"If it makes you dizzy or lightheaded, it's probably not a good idea to take it and then get behind the wheel of a car. There's a lot of dangerous interactions that can happen with over-the-counter medications and prescription medications."

### Seeking solutions

The topic of drug culture also was discussed during the event.

Panelist James Lear set the blame on pop culture, particularly for negatively influencing millennial by glamorizing drug use.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

### 07/03/2018 – Nation Celebration

Connerton, 21100 Fountain Garden Way in Land O' Lakes, will host its annual "Nation Celebration" July 3 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. There will be a rock wall, free games, fireworks, live music, food trucks, local crafters, free bounce houses, a \$250 gift card giveaway, and fireworks sponsored by Benedetto's Ristorante Italiano. Register online at Connerton.com/event-signup, to be eligible for gift card drawing. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

### 07/03/2018 – Red, White & Brew

The Lake House, 1201 Kenlake Ave., in Spring Hill, will host "Red, White & Brew" July 3 from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m. There will be live music, craft beers, fireworks, a vendor showcase, food vendors, a salute to veterans and more. Guests can bring their own chairs or blankets, but no outside food or drinks. For information, call Hits 106 at (727) 697-1063. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

### 07/04/2018 – Avalon's Independence Day

Avalon Park West in Wesley Chapel will host an Independence Day celebration on July 4 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., at its clubhouse, at 5227 Autumn Ridge Drive. There will be an apple pie bake-off, a bike parade, a wet/dry bounce park, community performances, and fireworks at 9 p.m. Admission is free. For information, call (813) 783-1515. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

### 07/04/2018 – Cardboard Boat Regatta

The Seven Oaks Clubhouse, 2910 Sports Core Circle in Wesley Chapel, will host a "4th of July Celebration & Cardboard Boat Regatta" on July 4 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Families can build a two-person cardboard boat and celebrate our freedom. The two people must be able to race in the boat. There will be awards for fastest, best team, most creative, people's choice, best younger team and the Titanic-best sinking. For information, visit 813Area.com. ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

### 07/04/2018 – Rhythm-n-Brews

Lear is a medical consultant at Becton Dickinson and has worked in the pharmacy industry for nearly 30 years, with expertise in a drug diversion programming.

“Shun pop culture,” Lear said. “Find somewhere else to find your values from.”

Lear also urged students to look out for each other and not fall into the peer pressure of abusing drugs and alcohol.

In the event of drug or alcohol use, he advised students to call a cab or ride-sharing service, like Uber or Lyft, instead of getting behind the wheel. “There’s no excuse to not make sure you have a safe way home,” he said.

Lear also encouraged students to get involved in their community and local politics to influence regulatory measures on public safety issues.

“Change your world. Change the way you live in it, and be an influence for good,” Lear said.

Since that tragic day in 2015, the Leonard family created a website, [StopDruggedDriving.net](http://StopDruggedDriving.net), to educate and raise awareness about drugged driving and drugged driving fatalities, as well as provide resources for those struggling with addiction. They’ve also been advocates for strengthening penalties for drugged driving.

“Our prayer is that one day drugged driving will cease to exist and other families will never have to put up with the tragic loss of loved ones that we have,” Tammy Leonard said.

For more information, visit [StopDruggedDriving.net](http://StopDruggedDriving.net).

*Published February 7, 2018*

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The second annual Fourth of July party at Rhythm & Brews, 4711 Gall Blvd., in Zephyrhills, will be on July 4 from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. Food will be provided by Flaming Q BBQ and Rhythm & Brews. There also will be beers from local brewers, and wine. Live band music will begin at 2 p.m., with a lineup for the entire day of festivities. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$15 the day of the event. For information, visit [Rhythm-n-brews.com](http://Rhythm-n-brews.com) or [Facebook.com/RhythmBrewsZephyrhills](https://www.facebook.com/RhythmBrewsZephyrhills). ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

### 07/04/2018 – Sparklebration

The annual “Sparklebration” celebration will be July 4 from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., at the Pasco County Fairgrounds, 36722 State Road 52 in Dade City. There will be live entertainment, free face painting, and for a nominal charge: a bounce house, pony rides and a petting zoo. There also will be a watermelon- and hot dog- eating contests, and a karaoke contest. Fireworks are scheduled for 9:15 p.m., weather permitting. Gates open at 4 p.m. Parking is \$5 per vehicle. Admission is \$6 for ages 13 and older. For information, visit [PascoCountyFair.com](http://PascoCountyFair.com). ... [\[Read More...\]](#)

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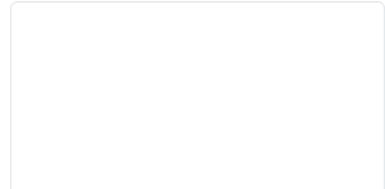


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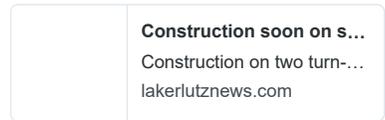
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