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## Dr. Steve Sroka brings 'the power of one' to Statesboro

By JAKE HALLMAN

Reporter for the Statesboro (Ga.) Herald

Sex, drugs and violence are big problems with teens, and Dr. Steve Sroka is trying to get the word out about "the power of one."

"You have the power of one to go and say something," Sroka said. "You don't know how much power you



Sroka

have to help someone out."

Sroka spoke to area middle school students and GSU health students Tuesday. He is the Disney Health Teacher of the Year, and a member of the

Teacher's Hall of Fame. Sroka has also appeared on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

The answer to mounting health issues with teens is education and caring, according to Sroka.

"The more you learn, the more you earn," Sroka said.

The "three 'Fs'" help kids, he said: family, friends and faith. Sroka illus-

trated his philosophy of caring with big hugs and a broad smile.

Many kids live with violence in the family, but not always the kind that leaves physical bruises, Sroka said.

"You guys live with a different type of violence," he said.

According to Sroka, one out of four families has the "invisible ele-

phant" of alcoholism.

Alcohol kills, and in college-age students can lead to rapes, Sroka said. Women are drinking more and more, he added.

"Girls are now binging like boys," Sroka said.

Tobacco is another leading killer that concerns Sroka.

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"Tobacco companies have tried to make you think it's so cool to smoke," he said.

According to Sroka, tobacco is the most addictive drug in America, and tobacco companies are now targeting women.

"Girls who smoke like men, die like men," he said.

Parents often don't have a realistic view of their children's activities, according to Sroka.

"Parents don't have a clue what's going on at school," he said. "Many, many adults have their heads in the sand."

In rural areas like Bulloch County, there are almost more problems than in large, urban areas, according to Sroka, because kids have easy access to drugs, alcohol and sex, often little parental supervision, and "too much time and too much money."

The best way to deal with kids' problems, Sroka said, is to talk to them and ask what's going on in their lives. Communities must face the

problems kids have, and be willing to confront them head-on.

Many students Sroka has spoken to believe that oral and anal sex are not "real sex." Sroka talked about a girl who believed she was still a virgin because she had only had anal sex.

"Uh-uh girl, you've got it wrong," he said.

By the same token, some men believe if they give anal sex to other men, they aren't gay, and aren't at risk.

"You're having male-to-male contact," Sroka said.

That kind of ignorance can lead to the spread of AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases.

"People think there's an end to AIDS," Sroka said. According to him, success stories like Magic Johnson's coping with the disease are anomalies. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 816,149 Americans have AIDS, and 467,910 have died from it.

"When it comes to

HIV/AIDS, education is our only weapon," he said.

Urban areas have been devastated by STDs, according to Sroka, with 25 percent of urban women having chlamydia.

Dropping urban birth rates may be due to damage caused by STDs, he added, and more and more teens are contracting hepatitis from improper sterilization of tattoo and piercing needles.

Herpes is also spreading wildly. "Right now, it is thought 90 percent of women who have it don't know they have it," he said.

Education is the key to fighting diseases. "We sometimes give kids wake-up calls in a language they can't understand," Sroka said.

Often, people don't talk about STD issues, he added, and urged testing for anyone in a sexual relationship. Speaking to GSU students, he said testing is especially important since half of all college students who have had more than one sexual partner have an STD.

Abstinence is ideal, Sroka said, followed by monogamy. At the least, sexually active teens should use a condom, though Sroka mentioned several risks associated with their use.

"A condom cannot protect your reputation, cannot protect your brain, cannot protect your heart," he said.

Sroka said drug use often starts well before college. Marijuana, which is widely (and erroneously, according to Sroka) considered non-addictive, is a gateway drug and much stronger than it has been in years past, he said.

"It's not your daddy's marijuana," he said.

According to the CDC, drugs killed 19,102 Americans in 1999, and 22.4 percent of high schools seniors have smoked marijuana in the past month.

Health care professionals are also dealing with growth in the use of inhalants, crystal meth, ephedra and GHB, Sroka said. "GHB is particularly insidious, and often used as a date-rape drug.

"It's the perfect crime drug," Sroka said. "It leave the body within hours."

Even supplements used by athletes are problematic, according to Sroka.

"You're developing in athletes today a muscle mass that can't be supported by skeletal structure," he said.

Kids are being manipulated by advertisers, Sroka said.

"Today your image of what's sexy, cool and hip is set up by people in these hot tanks who work for advertisers," he said.

"You've already been branded."

Advertisers often find popular students on campuses and convince them to wear and use their products, Sroka added.

Sroka asked a GSU student to name three beers, then asked a student to name three former secretaries of state. Without thinking, the student rattled off beer brands, but stumbled on the political question.

"It's so funny—the beer companies, they do a better job educating than we do," Sroka

said.

Children are also becoming meaner, according to Sroka, from influences like Jerry Springer's television show.

"Abnormal becomes normal it becomes a reference point," Sroka said.

That meanness leads to more bullying in schools, which can be a trigger in school shootings, he added. On top of that, kids are living in a more stressful world, especially with impending war.

"It's a tough time to be a teenager," Sroka said. "We know if you're healthier, you can handle this stuff better."

Sroka's visit was sponsored by the First District RESA, GSU College of Health and Human Sciences, the Bulloch Alcohol and Drug Council, Bulloch Commission on Human Services and Willingway Hospital.

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