

Decisions now affect lifelong health in choosing to remain drug-free

By: Neal A. Johnson | Source: Unterrified Democrat

Osage County Anti-Drug Community Action Team (OC-ADCAT) Student of the Month Madeline Gerloff, a senior at Chamois, has plans for a long, productive life, which she said would be hampered if she chooses to use drugs.

"It can really affect you later in life," she noted. "People don't realize how when you get a job, and especially the government, like I want to do, sometimes there's polygraphs involved, or background checks. If you have done drugs or alcohol or done something else, they will find out, and you will not be able to get that job because of something you did when you were 16 or 17. So, it's important to take that into account before you do anything like that because you can't take it back."

Health issues are another concern. "Smoking any type of drug can be hard on your lungs and heart and can really wear you down later in life," Gerloff said. "You don't want to shorten your lifespan. It might not matter in the moment, but it will matter when you're trying to watch your kids and grandkids grow up."

She was raised by Marty Gerloff and Erin Gerloff to stay away from drugs and alcohol, noting it was sound advice. "They told me there were other ways to have fun, and you don't need to listen to people about doing drugs or alcohol," Madeline said, adding she doesn't feel pressured by her peers to partake in either. "You can usually hang out with other people, or maybe older people that are drinking alcohol, and there'll be no pressure for you to do it." Gerloff said she's aware of people in the community who have struggled with addiction and wants no part of it. Further, she has a unique perspective on the dangers involved, especially with drinking and driving.

"Some of the drunk driving things we've done here, like the fake accidents, have really opened my eyes," she said. "Last year, I was a dead person. It was kind of weird, even though it was acting, to see people acting like I was dead. Being zipped up in a body bag was a different experience."

Such mock drills benefit everyone involved, from school personnel to emergency services, and students viewing the exercise have different reactions. Gerloff had seen the drill as a student with her classmates and again from the confines of a body bag.

"I think kids sometimes take it as a joke," she said, "but I think for some, it hits close to home, especially the people closest to the ones out there."

While Gerloff doesn't "preach" about her feelings on drugs and alcohol, she has shared her feelings with classmates and teammates. "I think some people listen, and I've seen some take what I say or what I bring to the table and use it," she said. "For the most part, I feel like I'm just giving people the tools to do it. It's kind of hard for me to really see the outcomes later, but I hope they use the tools that I give."

Additionally, she strives to set a good example for her brother, Grayson, an eighth-grader at Chamois. She also has two young half-siblings, Sadie and Brooks, and Gerloff plans to be there for them. "It's important to me that I set a good example," said Gerloff.

Chamois Guidance Counselor Meghan Birmingham nominated Gerloff because she is an amazing student with a 3.92 GPA. "She is not only involved in the school but also the community," said Birmingham. "She is a member of the fire department and part of many different organizations that help promote a positive and healthy lifestyle. Madeline is a role model to many of the young students here at Chamois. She has a fierce drive that helps her achieve her goals. I know that Madeline is going to do wonderful things and achieve all her goals."

Gerloff is also Student Council President, an officer in FFA and FBLA, and a member of the Environmental Club, band, volleyball, cross country, and track. She also works at Hermann Farms and is an active member of Chamois United Methodist Church.

Gerloff leads the way in all her pursuits. "Madeline is a very good leader," said Birmingham. "She is involved and takes a leadership role in all her clubs and activities. She is very caring and willing to help speak up for her fellow students. She takes the time to try and make the school a better place for all the students by offering a helping hand or a listening ear when needed."

During the summer between her sophomore and junior years, Gerloff was one of just 62 applicants accepted to the FBI Youth Leadership Program through the FBI National Academy Associates, Inc., a non-profit law enforcement leadership network.

That experience encouraged her to consider a career in law enforcement, but she's also considering other government work and may enter the military. "I want to get a degree in International Relations or Geographic Planning; it kind of depends on which school I go to," said Gerloff, who said she's stuck between a school in Boston, Massachusetts, or Montana State. "They are two very different places, but they're my top two," said Gerloff, who has applied for Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) at both schools. "I will see who gives me a scholarship, and I am considering the Army, but I'd rather be a Marine."

"She is a student leader in the classroom and takes her grades very seriously," said Birmingham. "Madeline strives for perfection in everything she does."

Principal Jeremy McKague agrees. "Madeline has the determination to reach her goals," he said. "As she works to achieve her goals, she leads a healthy life and strives to accomplish everything she sets out to do."

OC-ADCAT Executive Director Lorie Winslow will present Gerloff with a certificate, and he will be eligible to apply for the annual Student of the Month Scholarship.

"I am so excited to showcase our seniors who have chosen to live a drug- and alcohol-free life," said OC-ADCAT Education Committee Chairperson Charlotte Bellsmith. "I know this is not an easy thing to do. The pressure on our teens to drink while still underage is still pretty severe."

For more information about OC-ADCAT, visit <https://www.ocadcat.org>.