



Portage student's idea turned into public service announcement



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PORTAGE | A group of high school students walked out to a car in the parking lot of Portage High School Wednesday morning. Then they did it again. And again and again.

Though they wouldn't actually be driving anywhere, their efforts will be on display at the Chicago Auto Show later this month.

The five teens were participating in a public service announcement developed by one of them, PHS junior Rachel Diaz.

Diaz wrote the PSA about teens and distracted driving as part of an assignment in her video production class last November at the Porter County Career Center. The PSAs from the class were submitted to the first Drive Safe Chicago PSA contest sponsored by the Chicago Auto Show and the National Road Safety Foundation.

Just two weeks ago Diaz got the call that her PSA had won the contest. On Wednesday, a production company spent five hours taping scenes inside and outside the high school as well as inside a car for the 30-second spot and spent additional time at the career center rough editing the PSA.

Ryan Malarik, also a PHS junior and a member of the same video production class, was the runner up in the contest.

The PSA will premiere during a press conference Feb. 13 at the Chicago Auto Show's media day and will run on the social media video wall at the show from Feb. 14 through 22. It will also air on national television after the auto show.

Diaz, the daughter of Norma Diaz and the late Ray Diaz, said she was more than excited when she heard her PSA had won the top spot, which also came with a \$2,000 prize.

"I saw the number on the phone from New York and I thought it was a bill collector even though I don't have any bills to pay," Diaz recalled.

"They said I won and I barely remember what else was said. I was speechless for a few minutes and after awhile, I cried," Diaz said, adding winning the contest was a "huge deal" and an accomplishment she can put on her college applications and resume.

On Tuesday, Alan Weiss, of Alan Weiss Productions of White Plains, N.Y., and a

cameraman and sound engineer arrived in Portage. They spent the afternoon with Diaz scouting locations and planning the taping.

Diaz not only developed the PSA, but also acts in the spot and was able to work with Weiss directing the taping, looking at shots and reviewing audio after takes to make sure they got just the right angle to get the message across.

Members of Diaz's video production class, Sam Miller, of Valparaiso, Johnny Newell and Kennedy Starceвич, of Boone Grove, and Matt Kiley, of Portage, also starred in the production. Diaz's friend Adrianna Acevedo, of Portage, spent the day taking notes for Weiss documenting the various takes shot for the PSA.

Weiss met with Diaz and the other students at the high school Wednesday morning to go over the story board and outline the day's shooting.

"Her concept was considered the best concept," Weiss said, adding they were going to follow the concept as closely as possible.

Diaz said she wanted to take a different angle when developing the PSA.

While there is a lot of attention being paid to distractions cause by texting or talking on a cell phone while driving, Diaz said she wanted to concentrate on how other people can be just as distracting.

The PSA shows the five teens headed out to a car, talking about an upcoming dance and basketball game. They're teens being teens, joking, being loud. The driver, Diaz, becomes more frantic as the activity in the car escalates. At the end, the screen fades to black with the message "Distracted Driving: It's more than texting."

"We chose this concept because it shows that there are many things that can distract a driver," said David Reich of the National Road Safety Foundation. "Anything that takes the driver's eyes off the road and mind off driving is a distraction that can have serious consequences. And it's not only texting, which we think is an important message that teens and, indeed all drivers, must recognize."

"All of my friends and family are really excited for me," said Diaz, who hopes to go to college to study music management or become a music talent scout.