

Birthday card one of several initiatives promoting ‘smart choices’

“Happy Birthday!

“And stay well so you can celebrate again next year!”

That’s the philosophy behind and the message on the birthday card being developed by New Mexico State University for students who turn 21 while studying here.

The hope is that students will remember that too much alcohol can be fatal and avoid precipitating needless tragedies by celebrating carelessly.

A similar card will be sent to the student’s parents asking them to remind the student to celebrate responsibly.

The majority of students who attend NMSU do not drink or abuse alcohol, according to John Irvine, director of the Counseling and Student Development Center. But some do get caught up in dangerous drinking activities often promoted as “traditions” or “rites of passage” by their peers.

In the wake of the deaths of two NMSU students during the past school year, a campus-led, communitywide effort to end those myths generated a host of initiatives and programs meant to cope with the issue. Student counselors quickly embraced the idea of a birthday card that not only celebrated the student’s maturation, but also cautioned him or her about the dangerous, often fatal consequences of overuse of alcohol.

“I think it is a tremendous opportunity for the university to express its genuine concern for its students in a personal way,” said Casey Akins, co-coordinator of the Wellness, Alcohol and Violence Education program on campus and member of the president’s task force on healthy choices for students. “Particularly at a time which has proven to be a vulnerable moment in students’ lives, it’s important for us to reach out and let students know that we care about their safety.”



NMSU students approve of the new birthday card being sent by the university to those celebrating their 21st birthday. Photo by Darren Phillips

NMSU is not alone in the use of such a card. Oklahoma State University sends a similar card as does Texas A&M.

The greeting is but one of the initiatives the campus community enacted for this school year. Aggie Welcome Week featured guest speaker David Helstrum, a noted alcohol education expert, a round table on alcohol and violence and a four-act play that addressed alcohol abuse, sexual assault and diversity.

“Our greatest concern is in safeguarding the safety and well-being of our students, who as adults, are more likely to make smart decisions about lifestyles and behaviors given an increased awareness of risk and an expanded tool set to make life-altering decisions,” said Gladys DeNecochea, vice president for student services and dean of students.

Another initiative staffed graduate assistants in the Greek complex to help the organizations promote activities in compliance with university policies and to help them develop stronger relations with NMSU and the police department. There’s a new chartering process for student organizations. The campus alcohol policy is under review and the task force that has been meeting for the past year has completed a report of its activities and presented it to Provost William Flores.

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