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Courtesy photo

Soap Box Derby racers speed down a track in Colorado Springs at as much as 30 mph. Derby enthusiast and event promoter Judy Faass of Salida said she hopes to bring sanctioned derby racing to a hill near Salida next summer.

Two FYI forums focus on youth substance abuse

by Jan Wondra
Mail Staff Writer

With substance abuse on the rise in Chaffee County and statewide, Chaffee County Family & Youth Initiatives has scheduled two free public forums, one today in Buena Vista, the other Thursday in Salida, to address youth substance abuse.

Today's forum will be at the Buena Vista Community Center, 715 E. Main St. The Thursday forum will be in the Salida High School auditorium. Both run from 5:45-8 p.m. and will include a free, light dinner.

The events, said coordinator Dibby Olson, will provide guidance and education for youth, their families, health care providers, schools and community organizations that support youth.

"We want to continue the conversation on this very concerning issue of teen substance abuse," said Olson, who works as a drug and alcohol prevention educator for school-based and court-ordered substance abuse prevention programs.

"If we can provide more information for families and those who work with kids, to talk to them about this, we can support them in making good decisions."

Both forums will include a panel of experts discussing the growing health concerns, and each night will feature a different keynote speaker. The forum today will feature Dr. Richard Hildebrand, who directed the drug testing program in the Defense Department and was director of the Olympic Analytical Laboratory at UCLA.

The Thursday forum will feature Erin Flynn, marijuana education and youth prevention coordinator at Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

The panel discussions will include statistics on substance abuse and provide opportunity for audience participation.

"I rely on statistics, and what I see doesn't necessarily reflect yet in the statistics," said Olson, referring to the impact of the legalization of marijuana. "We have seen a slight rise – not as much as you would think given the legalization of marijuana – but that rise might be a year or two off.

"What it does do though, is to normalize drug use. It's sending a message that 'gee, it's safe because adults legalized it.' No matter what we say, that's the message they're receiving."

While the numbers on the use of marijuana are not yet clear, Olson said she is concerned about the rise in hard-core drug use.

"The rise in heroin and meth is concerning. Marijuana can cause teens to freak out, but it won't kill you. You can die easily from overdosing on heroin," said Olson.

"It often begins with an increased use of prescription opiates. But those are expensive and they move on to the cheaper drugs like meth and heroin. They are way more dangerous.

"I don't know if other counties are doing programs like this. I just know that we could be doing more to support kids in the schools and with community programs."

Olson said FYI has two main goals in hosting the forums. "First, we believe that our community has the resources within it to address this very concerning issue, particularly with this increased use of heroin. It's here – it's a huge problem in Pueblo and we're not that far upriver. We choose to realize there is a big concern around this and to address it in positive ways.

"The second point to get across to teens is that everybody is not doing it. There's a big perception out there with teens that 75 percent of their peers are doing some type of substance," said Olson. "But in actual use, in self-reporting... See SURVEYS, back page

SOAP BOX DERBY

Promoter hopes to bring derby to Salida

by John Cameron
Mail Staff Writer

When the starting gate drops, racers as young as 8 years old in the annual Pikes Peak Soap Box Derby begin coasting down a 900-foot-long ramp at speeds up to 30 mph.

Judy Faass, a motor sports promoter, hopes to bring Soap Box Derby, a gravity-fueled go-kart racing event like the one in Colorado Springs, to a hill near Salida for the first time next summer.

"The interest is there, but right now we are looking for a hill in the area where we can race," she said.

An informational kickoff meeting for interested participants is planned for 1:30 p.m. Sunday at The Bounty Restaurant, 413 W. U.S. 50, to discuss plans to bring racing to Salida.

A Soap Box Derby would involve youngsters racing hand-assembled cars, head to head, down an incline. The winning racer would advance in a bracket with the overall winners from Salida being eligible to compete in a national race held in Akron, Ohio, in July.

In preparation for the first

Soap Box Derby at a glance:

Planners hope to bring sanctioned Soap Box Derby to Salida and Chaffee County, with the inaugural event, now in the planning stages, set for next summer.

The event pits gravity-powered go-karts head to head on a downhill track. Two classes, stock and super stock, would be held for racers ages 7 to 18. Cars can reach up to 30 mph along the 900-foot-long course.

race, Faass has been searching the area for a paved road that meets race requirements. The track must be around 900 feet long and at a grade of 9 to 11 degrees near the start.

The track is among three things needed to get the sanctioned race off the ground.

"In addition to a race venue, we need to establish a board of directors and raise funds to become a licensed partner of the International Soap Box Derby," said Faass.

Faass, the owner of Faasst Motorsports Inc., recently moved to Salida from Colorado Springs, where she sponsored young drivers from among patients at Children's Hospital Colorado through the John Lee Memorial Soap Box Derby Fund. The racers participated in the Pikes Peak Soap Box Derby to honor the memory of Lee, Faass' friend who died in 2006.

"After 17 years in Colorado Springs, I felt called here to the Upper Arkansas Valley," she said.

Faass said derby racing promotes community and

work ethic among competitors, and she is eager to host the first race. "We are getting this going, and right now, it's down to business," she said.

Derby racing began in the United States as early as 1934 after a group of boys were seen racing hand-built cars in the hills of Ohio. The All-American Soap Box Derby has run almost continually in Akron since then, pausing only during years around World War II.

To host a race in Salida, Faass plans to raise the necessary \$14,000 for course logistics, safety and other equipment plus an additional \$1,600 in one-time licensing fees to hold races in two different classes.

Participants may build cars for either "stock" and "super stock" events depending on the racers' ages and size.

The cars are built from kits and must meet strict weight and design specifications. A basic build can run upwards of \$600 and can be paid for through sponsorships obtained by participants, said

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