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## Woman who lost an arm gives real-life lesson in safe driving

BY CECIL ANGEL

The black spaghetti strap top and purple athletic shorts that Sarah Panzau wore Tuesday at an assembly at Roosevelt High School in Wyandotte was not a fashion statement.

She wanted students to see the scars, skin grafts and what remained of her left arm after a crash that followed her choice to drive drunk Aug. 23, 2003.

"It's simply not worth it," Panzau said to about 600 students. "It's not worth the hell I've been through in the last five years."

For the last four years, Panzau, 27, of Belleville, Ill., has been a member of the National Anheuser-Busch Speakers Bureau urging students not to drink before age 21; not to drive drunk; to respect their parents, and to not let disabilities limit them.

"Do you really want to spend the rest of your life hoping you're one of the lucky ones?" she asked.

During the assembly, she recapped her life as a two-time member of the National Junior College Athletic Association women's volleyball All-America team while a student at Southwestern Illinois College and how it all changed.

According to police, Panzau who was 21 at the time, tried to exit I-64 in East St. Louis traveling 72 m.p.h. in a 25-m.p.h. zone. During the crash, she was thrown through the rear window of her 1996 Saturn, the glass severing her arm.

As she was dragged 25 feet along the guardrail, the left part of her scalp was ripped off, her jaw was broken in seven places, and all but five vertebrae were fractured. She has had more than 30 surgeries to repair those and other injuries.

Now she spends her days urging students to make wise choices to students across the country.

"Because of one choice I've made, this is the body I'm trapped in," she said.

Many students were touched by Panzau's message.

"I've learned we're not invincible," said Eddie Vineyard, 16, of Wyandotte, a junior. "We can't do anything we want."

Alison Nelson, 17, of Wyandotte, noted Panzau's resilience. "It was very interesting," the senior said. "She still has a very good attitude about life."

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photos by ANDRE J. JACKSON/Detroit Free Press

Sarah Panzau, from Bellville, Ill., talks about drinking and driving as Darian O'Brien, 15, looks on Monday at Roosevelt High School in Wyandotte. Panzau lost her arm and endured numerous operations after being involved in a car accident while driving drunk.

