

## Alive at 25

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University of Memphis professor Wayne Gutch, left, tells parents of Collierville High School students about an upcoming class for parents on teen driving. Tommy Roberson, Assistant Director of Continuing Education at the University of Memphis, assists Gutch. (April R. Phillips/The Independent, SCN)

Between 1985 and 1996, 17 teens died in auto accidents, earning the area the highest death rate for teens in auto accidents in America.

That's the fact University of Memphis professor Wayne Gutch presented to parents in the Collierville High School auditorium on Jan. 24.

"These are your children. (Driving) is one thing in their life that will be a severe danger to them," said Gutch. One of the biggest reasons teen drivers are at risk, he said, is that they lack experience, and parents don't always set the best example for them to follow.

Gutch will be teaching an Alive at 25 class for Parents to augment the classes he teaches students at 13 Memphis-area high schools. The presentation he gave at Collierville High School was a sample of what he will be teaching parents at the University of Memphis on March 2.

Ninth graders at Germantown, Collierville, Houston, Briarcrest, Hutchison, St. Benedict and other high schools benefit each year from his teaching, Gutch believes. Since he started the class in 1996 in Germantown, only one teen, a pedestrian, has been killed in an accident involving a vehicle in that city.

Credited for its support of the class, for which Germantown pays \$15,000 annually, the municipality has been ranked one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People by America's Promise Alliance.

The Town of Collierville also funds Gutch's class.

Since the mid-90s, Gutch has relayed life-saving facts and figures to 17,000 Memphis-area students. It helps that he's not their dad, he said. He explains the physics and fines involved with driving and challenges kids to make right choices.

"I'm very honest with them," he told the Collierville parents. "I make every effort not to lecture."

Gutch said he tells students they may see mom driving while drinking coffee, adjusting the radio, talking on her phone and helping them with their math - all at once.

"Number one, mom shouldn't do these things." Nonetheless, to the teens he says, "You're not there yet."

Put away the cell phone, understand the dangers of mixing alcohol with driving and don't race yellow lights, he admonished the parents.

"Do you have radar?" he challenged. "Do you yell and scream at other drivers?" Though he admitted he fumes a little (out of sight and earshot of others), he said, "Don't let someone have emotional control over you."

He also advised when stopping behind a car, allow enough room so that the back tires can be seen. This gives enough room to escape if you experience a car-jacking - something that's on the rise, Gutch said.

Although graduated licenses are good, Gutch says parents are better and should take control by tying

driving privileges to good behavior and grades. They should make a contract with kids to pick them up if they've taken drugs or have been drinking the slightest amount.

Being strict, checking the mileage after a child borrows the car and remembering who's in charge provides leverage, he said.

"Nothing, nothing will be more powerful than you snapping your fingers and saying, 'Give me the keys,'" Gutch said.

The *Alive at 25 for Parents* class will be held at the University of Memphis on March 2, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. The class fee is \$40 for each couple. To register, go online to [umce.memphis.edu](http://umce.memphis.edu).