

To a Higher Degree for Nov. 25, 2012
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While preserving the safety and well-being of students on and off campus has been an ongoing priority for St. Cloud State and its community partners, recent crimes and a tragic death in the university neighborhood have led us to refocus our efforts.

This increased commitment to student safety stems in part from the September death of 20-year-old Colton Gleason, a visiting Minnesota State University-Mankato student who died as a result of injuries sustained during an unprovoked attack in an alley near campus. While Colton was not part of our campus community, his death shocked and saddened his friends and others in our community.

I was deeply touched when Colton's two brothers met with me to talk about their concern for safety in the St. Cloud community and their interest in what the campus and city are doing together to prevent others from having to endure the kind of pain their family has suffered.

We are committed to honoring their interest and the concern that so many have echoed.

Our students are taking a prominent leadership role in building a coalition of advocates who are passionate about making this a safer community. In October, more than 500 students and university staff joined community members in a Student Government-coordinated Light Up the Night walkthrough of the campus neighborhood.

A second walkthrough will take place Nov. 27 to study lighting and other aspects of the neighborhood environment that could have an impact on safety.

An Ad Hoc Committee on Student Safety organized by Student Government is working with law enforcement and campus leaders to step up efforts to enhance safety for students and to find ways to increase their awareness of actions and choices they can take to reduce their risk of becoming victims of crime.

In all our conversations and activities surrounding campus and neighborhood safety, we draw on a strong community partnership rooted in a deep commitment from community leaders to work together for the good of our students.

Mayor Dave Kleis is more than an alumnus of St. Cloud State, he's a true partner who believes our students are not just passing through as they get their degrees. He knows that while they are here, they are residents who contribute to the local economy and the local flavor of the community.

We will continue our collaboration with the city to work on improving safety in the South Side neighborhood and help educate students about how to become less vulnerable to those who would prey on them. Here are some of the steps we have taken over the past six years:

- Mayor Kleis and I, along with dozens of other police and university personnel have walked the neighborhoods adjacent to the university to welcome students and caution them to take steps to protect themselves by locking their doors, closing first-floor windows and avoiding walking alone at night.
- The Police Department has created the Community Crime Impact Team of three officers who spend 30 percent of their time on issues relating to the university neighborhood and conducting safety education programs on campus. This fall the team is staffing a Kiosk in Atwood each Wednesday to increase their accessibility to students.
- New city ordinances and university action have reduced unsafe behavior. For example, arrests as a result of the Social Host ordinance have significantly decreased since 2010 when the ordinance was put in place to increase fines and other disciplinary actions for students who host large parties that involve underage drinking and disruptive behavior.
- St. Cloud State has developed programs such as UCHOOSE to educate and support students in making responsible choices when they socialize. Since fall 2009 UCHOOSE programs have educated more than 13,600 individuals in high-risk drinking prevention. According to the College Student Health Survey, the percentage of SCSU students who report engaging in high risk drinking has decreased dramatically over the past six years from a rate that was significantly above the national average to a rate now below the national average. Also according to the Survey, 77.4 percent of our students reported that they have not let alcohol use negatively affect their academic activities.
- The recidivism rate for violators of minor consumption laws has also decreased from 12 percent to 6.9 percent since the implementation of the St. Cloud Diversion Program two years ago. The Diversion Program allows students and nonstudents who have first or second violations of alcohol ordinances to choose an education program over district court.

Lives have been saved through these and other collective actions among the City of St. Cloud, the St. Cloud Police Department, the neighborhood associations and our Student Government.

We will continue to make changes that help us continue our joint efforts to look after our students and to encourage them to look after each other while holding them accountable on and off campus.