

Expert gives advice on surviving tragedy

By RYAN ANDERSON
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Students and parents in Pearland got a small taste of what it is like to go through a school tragedy Jan. 30 when Escape School came to the Pearland High School Auditorium.

Escape School is a seminar held by Bob Stuber, former police officer and national safety expert. Stuber has also been a frequent guest on Oprah Winfrey's show.

At the heart of the escape school message is the need to think clearly in times of panic.

"There is only one issue that I hope people take away from the presentation and that is to be smart instead of being scared," Stuber said. "What we want to do is help them understand that common sense is the best crime-fighting tool. There is nothing on this planet that can make you safer than common sense."

Stuber defines the common-sense aspect as thinking clearly during a tragedy.

"If you are scared, you are going to get panicked and you aren't going to find the safe way that you need to get out of the situation," Stuber said. "If you are smart you will have thought about something like this and you will have a plan and that will be based on common sense."

Through the Escape School program, Stuber provides students, teachers, and parents practical advice and survival essentials when confronted with the ever present issue of school violence.

The tips are not limited to school violence situations, however. Stuber is working on ways to think clearly when confronted with another form of violence as well.

"We have a program that deals with the issue of office violence. In fact we shot some footage for it while we were in Houston," Stuber said. "The information in the two programs is very similar but the office one is geared a little more to the adults."

According to Stuber, workplace violence shows no signs of going away.

"There is a big rise in the number of violent acts in the workplace," Stuber said. "A lot of the forecasts are that kind of trend may continue because there are so many other oddball things going on out there. It is a strange time."

Pearland High School was one of three sights in the greater Houston area chosen for the presentation.

"Pearland came about as a location because my corporate sponsor, Dignity Memorial, has a funeral home in Pearland and the funeral director (Christian Corl) there has been setting things up for us."

The Escape School program was started seven years ago, however, it has only been touring for the past four years.

"During the first three years we were doing a lot of national TV shows like Oprah and Good Morning America," Stuber said. "We were in the building phase of the program. For the past four years we have been touring the program really, really hard."

Stuber spends about 100 days a year on the road and said that he averages about two presentations a day during that time.

Escape School is sponsored by KHOU and Dignity Memorial.

"We're proud to help bring Escape School to Houston," said Wendy Burkeen, KHOU community marketing director.

Besides the Pearland presentation Escape School will be held at Northbrook Senior High School, Jan. 31 and Kingwood High School on Feb. 1.

Aside from creating Escape School, Stuber is the author of Missing Stranger Abduction: Smart Strategies to Keep Your Child Safe.