

# As Beach Week Beckons, Parents Grapple With Concerns

by KRISTEN ARMSTRONG, Staff Writer

(Created: Saturday, March 15, 2008 6:13 AM EDT) Sun Gazette

---

Many seniors are looking forward to graduation and then having some summer fun at Beach Week. But will they be building sand castles and looking for seashells?

They might, but statistics show that many of them will be engaging in underage drinking and engaging in other risky activities.

The Arlington Public Schools' Department of Student Services and PTA Family Network held a panel discussion on March 12 to detail the pros, cons and pitfalls of the annual ritual.

The panelists brought different perspectives to the table, but all encouraged parents and students to communicate with each other, even if it proves difficult.

“Talk to your teens, and keep your eyes open,” said panelist Keith Banks, police chief of the Rehoboth Beach (Md.) Police Department. “This is not the time to be a friend, but to be a parent.”

Reporting that Rehoboth Beach's arrests in June (generally the month when most Beach Weeks take place) are higher than July and August's arrests combined, Banks laid out the repercussions of illegal behavior during Beach Week.

“Scholarships can be revoked, car insurance can go up and, yes indeed, there's jail time,” he said.

Parents probably aren't looking forward to telling their teens that Beach Week might not be the best idea, for fear of the anger, sulking and “you've ruined my life” lines that may follow.

But Arlington parent John Mahoney, who didn't let his three children go, said, “it takes just 15 minutes of courage.”

Even though his oldest daughter said not going to Beach Week was one of the worst experiences of her life, she forgave him eventually.

(Mahoney said he hadn't helped matters by accidentally asking where all her friends were during that week, not once, but twice.)

Fervently against Beach Week was panelist Theo Stamos, a prosecutor in Arlington County, who believes it should be banned. She suggested that parents do anything in their power to keep their children from going.

"Quite frankly, just bribe them with \$1,000," she said. "I'm partly joking, but after paying for bail and a lawyer, you'll come out ahead."

Dr. Regina Milteer, a pediatrician, conducted a study showing that the negative after-effects of Beach Week are not limited to legal repercussions.

"All the girls I talked to said they had a good time at Beach Week, but most of them had feelings of guilt," she said. "With the Internet and You Tube, everything we do can be scrutinized, and they didn't know if they'd ruined their reputations or if their parents would find out."

For Arlington parent Maureen Nilsen Simmons, allowing her children to go to Beach Week was decided on a case-by-case basis.

"There's two sides to everything. Make decisions based on what you know about your child," Simmons said. "You're the expert on your kid."

Her suggestions to parents are to "think about the location, the level of supervision and length of visit you are comfortable with."

Simmons' daughter avoided the regular Beach Week crowd and potential problems by spending the time in the Outer Banks of North Carolina with "no other beach kids," rather than going to one of the more popular, closer destinations.

Although the panelists were, for the most part, against Beach Week, they recognize that many students will still go. To them, Chief Banks made it clear why they should make responsible decisions and not participate in underage drinking and drug use.

"You're going to get caught," he said.