

Hi-Tech driving comes to Seymour High School

Seymour High wins national prize

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Seymour, Conn. (WTNH) - Thanks to a Nor'easter, Seymour has two new and expensive driving simulators.

Last July, Seymour High School won the "Toyota and Discovery Education Teen Defensive Driving Program" grand prize. The \$250,000 winnings brought new Toyota's to the Valley for students to practice defensive driving. The program, however, was short-lived, as the strong winter storm canceled the latter part of the October weekend.

So Richard Kearns, who is the director of school security and wrote the grant to bring Toyota to Connecticut, had another idea. Since his school didn't get the complete package, he asked Toyota Motor Sales USA to donate two new "Virtual Driver Interactive Full-cab Driving Simulators." The company agreed, and the \$18,000 apiece machines were recently delivered to the high school.

Now, when students enter the high school, they pass what is known as the "Wildcat Toyota Teen and Community Driving Center." The simulators are state-of-the art, with detailed programs coming up with about any scenario. Some that most students hope they never come across, including driving under the influence, crashing while texting, and severe weather situations.

"I'm never going to drive again in the snow. For someone who's never driven before, and getting their license, it really teaches them what could happen," said senior Jessica Edwards.

"It's fun at first," says senior Casey Hayden. "The first time I got there, I was like, 'wow! This is cool, getting out of class to drive this thing!' It's like a video game."

However, Casey quickly learned about the pain associated with getting arrested. After she wrecked her virtual car, an officer appeared on screen, giving a roadside test, later taking her to jail and then to court.

There is also a virtual job interview where the driver loses a great opportunity because a driving record is stained.

"They've hit walls, vehicles, and trees on this. They're really learning an important lesson," Kearns said outside the driving center.

We've all heard the horror stories of what can happen when youth and wheels combine. Seymour has a 21st century tool to make sure kids stay safe, stay alive, and that a parent, hopefully, will never have to give a stern lecture.

"My dad just wants me to get the certificate so my insurance gets lower, because he pays for it, I don't," Jessica said laughing.