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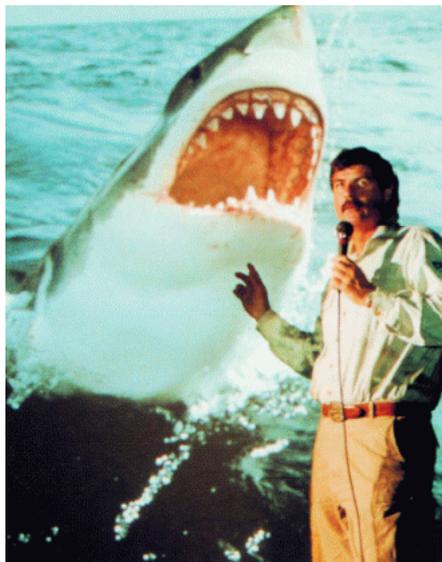
### Top Stories

## Taking Bite Out of Drugs

By: JON HALBERG, Gazette Staff Writer October 14, 2001

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**Speaker urges kids to make right directions.**

**The chances of teens dying from drugs and alcohol are much greater than from a shark attack, Stephen Arrington tells his audience.**

When Steve Arrington was arrested in 1982 for drug trafficking in California, it came as a huge relief.

Arrington was being escorted by two Mafia "hit men" back to a car loaded with cocaine he'd abandoned against the orders of his underworld employer.

Just then, he was arrested by a dozen armed DEA agents.

"I had tried to walk away from it all," Arrington said. "By being arrested, I was actually saved from a life that was out of control."

Arrington will tell his story to students at the Indiana Area Junior High School at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday as part of his effort to keep others from falling into the drug trap.

A former Navy bomb-disposal frogman and Cousteau Society chief diver, Arrington had become involved with the cocaine trade and was looking for a way out that didn't involve his death.

"What I got caught up in was the scariest moment of my life - I could easily have been killed," said Arrington. "I feel what I've been through and what I have to say about it can make a difference to kids."

There's little doubt about the need for area youth to hear Arrington's message, according to King Stumpp, executive director of the Open Door drug and alcohol outpatient treatment center in Indiana.



**Trader Horn**

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"There's no question about the need for programs like this," Stumpp said.

According to Stumpp, of the 400 to 450 clients at the Open Door each year, about half are of junior high age - 13 to 15 years old.

"You're talking about 200 kids each year that we see in adolescent treatment for drug- and alcohol-related problems," Stumpp said. "The more that we're able to raise the consciousness of both students and parents to these issues, the better off the community is."

#### ◁ READER POLL

**What should be done with the Pledge of Allegiance**

**and the phrase "under God?"**  
**E-mail us with your comments.**

- Leave it as it is
- Remove the phrase, but keep the pledge
- Leave the phrase in, but make the pledge optional
- If the phrase remains, remove the pledge from public schools

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Arrington's talk "will definitely be a help," said John Scherf, school resource officer at the junior high for the Indiana Borough Police Department.

"I think definitely the experiences he shares are going to be a deterrent factor. Kids are going to realize, 'Hey, I could screw up the rest of my life.'"

Principal Walter F. Kealey agreed.

"We ought to get the guy to stay for a week," Kealey said. "I wish I could."

The day after his arrest, Arrington said, he discovered that the cocaine was destined for John Z. DeLorean and that he was a codefendant in that now-famous trial.

De Lorean, who in the early 1970s was high on the list to head General Motors, was arrested on money laundering charges in 1982. Aside from time spent raising bail, he never went to jail and was acquitted of all charges.

Though DeLorean was exonerated, Arrington pleaded guilty and received a five-year prison sentence.

According to Kealey, Arrington comes highly recommended from across the country. He said he especially likes the fact that Arrington tells his story without glorifying his past.

"The mistake that I made was my own fault," Arrington said. "(The Medellin drug cartel) knew that I had made wrong choices, and, yes, they took advantage of my being in a vulnerable position, but the choices were mine.

"I pleaded guilty because I was guilty - I simply told the judge what I did," Arrington said. "I promised the judge, and probably a lot of people make this kind of promise, that I'd talk to kids about making the wrong choices."

But Arrington has been keeping his promise for more than a decade, talking to students about drugs, alcohol and tobacco at more than 900 elementary, junior high and high schools in 48 states.

"When you're talking about 13-, 14- and 15-year-olds, you're talking mostly about experimentation with alcohol, marijuana and huffing (inhaling glue, gasoline vapors or other substances)," Stumpp said.

"We also can't overlook the nicotine issue," Stumpp said. "Nicotine is a drug, and you're talking about a lot of experimentation (from ages 13 to 18) with nicotine."

It's important to talk about tobacco, Stumpp said, because it's what he called a "gateway drug."



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"For young people, there are several different established gateway patterns, meaning a drug of lower risk or intensity is used as the gateway to drugs of greater risk or intensity," Stumpp said.

"Things like caffeine, everything from Mountain Dew and cappuccino ... to the nicotine experimentation in both the form of cigarette smoking and smokeless tobacco, those basically represent gateways to experimentation with other things," Stumpp added. "You don't want to leave that piece out when you're talking to that age group."

Arrington cited statistics saying that 25 percent of U.S. eighth-graders had tried drugs.

"When you add inhalants - glue, paint, gasoline - that goes up to 35 percent," Arrington said.

Nationally, fourth grade is the average age when kids start to try drugs, Arrington said.

"When DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) started in schools, it started in the fifth grade, but now it's down to the fourth," Arrington said.

Though Scherf said he doesn't see signs of a drug problem at the junior high here now, he added that educating students in that age group is a good way to head off problems in the future.

"There's a pretty substantial amount of drugs in and around the area," Scherf said. "We do have all the big-city drugs here in Indiana."

Scherf, who's involved with the Indiana County Drug Task Force, said officials had brought a K-9 unit unannounced to the junior high last year and the dog detected no illegal substances in students' lockers.

He added that he's received no response from an anonymous "tip" box near his office in the school, which should make it easy for teens to report drug problems confidentially.

Arrington's message has as much to do with a positive future as it does with the negatives of drugs.

"I tell kids to actively pursue their dreams," Arrington said. "Kids want to make the right choices, but it's hard because they have adult choices to make in today's world."

"Nancy Reagan told the kids a few years ago to 'Just Say No,'" Arrington said. "But the issues are too big for kids now; it's really tough to be a kid today."

"I ask them, 'How do you feel when you do something good?'" Arrington said. "They say 'Good.' How do you feel when you do something bad? 'Bad.' And it's not only that it makes them feel bad, but often if they make the wrong choices, it can lead to adult nightmares."

"The Cousteau Society - I got that opportunity because of what I was doing right," Arrington said. "Working as a Navy frogman - that was because of what I was doing right."

"But when I went to prison, I lived in fear 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year," Arrington said. "I spent almost three years living that way because of what I did wrong."

and Arrington.

One of the major reasons for the bigger problems kids face today, Arrington said, is the breakdown of the American family.

"It's got to be the family unit," he said. "When you look at the statistics, 40 percent of the kids born in the U.S. today are born into single-parent families."

"One of the things I ask kids is about the ex-president (Bill Clinton)," Arrington said. "He said he didn't inhale. Do you think he inhaled?"

"They roar out laughing and say yes," Arrington said. "Do you think that's a good message to send to kids?"

(On the net, [www.drugsbite.com](http://www.drugsbite.com))

## About the Program

Stephen Arrington is the author of "Journey Into Darkness," a true story that begins in Hawaii and ends in the depths of the ocean in search of a Great White Shark. In between, he found himself trapped in drug smuggling and serving five years in prison.

His program includes slides from seven Cousteau expeditions taken while he was the chief diver of the windship Alcyone.

"When I began to write 'Journey Into Darkness' in my jail cell, I never would have believed that I'd finish it on a Cousteau expedition vessel," Arrington wrote in a promotional brochure.

His slides include shots of huge great white sharks, diving with an underwater lava flow, swimming with killer whales and riding giant manna rays.

But the underlying goal of the program, according to Arrington, is to motivate young people to reach for their dreams and not make choices that lead to nightmares like the one he lived after becoming involved in cocaine.

The program begins at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday at Indiana Area Junior High School. It is open to the public.

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