

Gazette

COMMENT

Join Cas to help keep our town tidy

LAST month, we launched our Tidy Our Town campaign, which urges anyone living near an area needing some work, to bring it to our attention.

The campaign was, in part, a response to the borough's perhaps undeserved reputation as being too litter-strewn and dirty.

Nowhere is that more apparent than in our High Street, particularly after Friday and Saturday nights.

Some people say it is Colchester Council's responsibility to keep our streets clean, and blame it when high standards are not met.

However, the authority spends hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money every year on staff who pick up rubbish or blast the roads clean.

At the end of the day, it is down to us, as residents of Colchester, to take pride in the place we call home.

That is why it is our pleasure to praise Cas Morehen, franchisee of Colchester's McDonald's restaurants, for stumping up the cash to provide a series of bins and sponsor a pair of street cleaning machines.

Unlike many other retailers and restaurateurs in the town centre, he was only too happy to acknowledge he should take at least some responsibility for the burger wrappers and drinks cartons left on the ground by his patrons.

We hope others follow his example, and take as much pride in our town.

HARD-HITTING TALKS TO SHOCK YOUNG DRIVERS

Teaching teens to be safe on the road

By JAMES COX
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DRIVING has become part of everyday life. It is vital for getting around – and teenagers can't wait to learn.

But teenagers are both blessed and cursed with a misconception of their own invulnerability.

Combined with inexperience, this can have tragic consequences.

A driving course is using graphic images and real-life experiences to shock a new generation of motorists into slowing down.

The StreetLife Young Driver Education scheme takes place at Colchester United's Weston Homes Stadium on the first Sunday of each month.

Teenagers, from 15-years-old, can have an actual driving lesson in the safe environment of the stadium car park.

But, before they are allowed behind the wheel, they are given a talk from a guest speaker warning them of the dangers of the road.

Guests have included police officers, paramedics, wheelchair-bound car crash victims and even bereaved parents who lost their children in road accidents.

StreetLife owners Karl Rushen and Gary Lipman want teenagers to see the real-life consequences of bad driving – even if those images are difficult to look at.

Mr Rushen, 33, said: "I know we won't change the world but these

Young drivers are unlikely to be driving a modern car with all the safety features



■ Behind the wheel – Karl Rushen of StreetLife shows Kallum Vanstone how to drive

Picture: NIGEL BROWN CO72157_01

kids are still in the schooling frame of mind and can take on information.

"The people who speak to them are real people. The images we show are real. We didn't want actors and fake blood.

"I know as well that, their parents are standing at the back thinking 'I text while driving' or 'I sometimes go a bit fast'.

"The kids are here for the driving lessons, we know that. But they have to take in this information first."

Mr Rushen, of Tollesbury, has been a driving instructor for 13 years and owner of StreetLife for eight years.

He is also a retained fireman in his home town and was inspired to run the classes after attending two fatal road crashes within a fortnight.

The Weston Homes Communi-

ty Stadium offers an impressive venue, with its spacious conference room and giant TV facility.

A total of 85 youngsters turned up for the latest hour-long session and heard a talk from Essex Air Ambulance volunteers.

Volunteer Peter Hennessey gave them, and their parents, a history of road accidents.

He showed shocking images of road crash victims, some alive and some not so lucky.

There were audible gasps during shocking video footage of a high-speed crash on an American highway.

In one particularly candid film, two reckless young drivers had mounted a camera inside a makeshift rally car which they took for a spin on some country roads.

The audience drove with them as they careered into a lorry,

their heads colliding during the devastating impact.

Mr Hennessey said: "Young drivers are unlikely to be driving a modern car with all the safety features. They need to see these images."

The sessions, in association with Colchester United Football Club and supported by the Gazette, are a hit with the young attendees.

Abi Gosling, 16, from Tiptree, said: "You learn how to drive safely and the dangers of the road."

"We have had talks and seen videos of crashes and I think it will stop people driving too fast. I am enjoying it as well as learning."

The next session takes place on December 2 costing £25, and can be booked online at www.streetlifedriving.com

MY VIEW



JAMES COX

THE British people are notoriously hardy during tough times. That Blitz mentality has been called upon during the economic downturn.

We have all been asked to join the Big Society, pitch in and muddle-through. We are all in this together, we are told.

Last year, an Act was given royal assent that makes it law for councils to encourage residents to get involved in their community.

The Localism Act hopes to put services and resources back in the hands of the people who use them.

It looks to encourage volunteers to step forward and take the load off the council's stretched coffers.

Ultimately, it looks to reduce costs

Will you pitch in to help the community?

by getting residents to use their skills and experience in aid of their community.

It is easy to be cynical. I have heard musings along the lines of "Basically they want us to do what they do now – but for no pay?"

But consider the alternative.

Colchester's funding from central Government is dwindling.

Councillors are debating difficult

decisions – like selling services to outside providers and reducing its property stock.

If we cannot come forward and take over our favourite services they could be lost forever.

Examples of localism can already be seen all over Colchester borough. West Mersea Town Council has taken on the Glebe leisure centre and Colchester's countryside volunteer rangers

ensure High Woods Country Park remains a pristine beauty spot.

My main problem with localism is that for a piece of legislation intent on engaging the public, it is, quite frankly, boring.

This is a 500 page document riddled with jargon which alienates the very people it should be addressing – you and me.

You would be excused for nodding off somewhere between the section on the Participatory Budget Unit Toolkit and the Community Right to Bid list.

I am all for community involvement – but I am less convinced as to how Colchester Council will go about inspiring people into action.