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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **MONMOUTH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE HOLDS UNIQUE HEROIN FORUM IN THE FIGHT AGAINST OPIATE ABUSE**

**Freehold:** Sheriff Shaun Golden continues to be a leader in the fight against drug abuse as the heroin epidemic remains one of the most important crises law enforcement in Monmouth County must conquer. As the number of opiate related deaths rise, the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office held its annual heroin forum called, **Student Ambassadors For Heroin Use Prevention**, on Apr. 25. The program bridged students and leaders of various agencies together, to address opiate addiction.

"Law enforcement, educational and behavioral healthcare professionals can't combat this problem alone," said Sheriff Shaun Golden. "That's why it's of the utmost importance that our adolescents and young adults, along with the professionals, work together to provide new and innovative approaches, strategies and solutions. Through this initiative, we hope to inhibit the wave of opiate use, addiction and related deaths."

Through the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office unique format, students from Monmouth University, Brookdale Community College and high schools from Middletown, Manalapan, Keansburg, Howell, Holmdel, Wall, Asbury Park and West Long Branch came up with an action plan which consisted of strategies and solutions to the heroin crisis from a peer perspective. The groups were moderated by prominent leaders of the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office, the Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office, the Monmouth County Superintendent of Schools, the NJ Department of Education and prevention and addiction specialists.

"This event is for our students whose friends are being lost to this insidious epidemic," said Principal Richard Allen, Poseidon Early College HS.

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“Through the program, our youth can help become effective peer leaders in the fight against opiate abuse, since the agents of change are some of these young men and women who participated in the conference.”

The abuse of opiates has reached epidemic proportions throughout the nation as well as in our communities.

In 2016, Monmouth County lost approximately 164 residents to opiate related deaths. Those numbers are troubling, especially compared to the most recent statistics of highway fatalities and homicides in 2016, which were 49 and 7 respectively.

“We need to come up with strategies. It is tearing the fabric of our communities apart and we need you to think outside the box,” said Douglas Collier, Drug Initiative Coordinator & Law Enforcement Liaison, NJ Office of Attorney General who was the featured speaker. “We don’t have all the answers and that’s why it’s important we hear from you, on what needs to be done.”

“We collectively came up with several strategies to address this issue,” said Rachel Kuhlthau, Wall High School. “Because kids think it’s cool to do drugs, our groups created a slogan ‘Not Cool is Cool’. We also proposed to target middle school students about the dangers of drugs and want to make information and program more available to all students.”

“This program was a great learning experience. The open dialogue and input from us as students will help make a difference,” said Eli Avivi, Manalapan High School. “We believe that getting parents more involved is the key to addressing this issue. In addition, having more accessible resources and social media outreach will help deal with the problem.”

The Monmouth County Sheriff’s Office thanks all the participants of the program for their dedication and commitment to this important topic especially the participating high schools and colleges, the Monmouth County Prosecutor’s Office, the Monmouth County Superintendent of Schools, the New Jersey State Commissioner of Education, the Monmouth County Office of Addiction Services, Prevention First and the Asbury Park/Wall Elks Lodge #128.

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A special thanks to Kimberley Harrington, NJ Commissioner of Education, Douglas Collier, Drug Initiative Coordinator & Law Enforcement Liaison NJ Office of Attorney General, Dr. Ramon Solhkhah M.D., Meridian Health Behavioral Services, Richard Allen, Principal Poseidon High School, Dr. Lester Richens, Monmouth County Superintendent of Schools and Monmouth County Prosecutor Christopher Gramiccioni for their participation and support.

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