



For Immediate Release: February 20, 2023

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PRESS RELEASE – MEDIA INVITATION TO ATTEND AFTER THE FIRE PROGRAM

GREENVILLE: Two burn survivors of the January 2000 Seton Hall University residence hall fire will visit with seniors at Greenville High School (GHS) on Thursday, February 23. Their inspirational story – one that all young adults moving off from home for the first time should hear – will be told at Greenville High School (3515 Lion's Lair Road, Greenville, Texas 75402) starting at 9:00 a.m.

Shawn Simons and Alvaro Llanos will speak on their documentary “After the Fire: A True Story of Heroes and Cowards.” The film shares their experiences from the night of the fire and through the long, emotional, spiritual, and physical recovery. The two survivors will speak on their experiences as well as host a question-and-answer session with the audience. Students will watch the 90-minute film prior to coming to the assembly.

“After the Fire” is an award-winning documentary about the arson fire on the campus of Seton Hall University in 2000. Three students were killed and over fifty were injured in a fire that started as a prank but rapidly spread in a common area at Boland Hall, a freshman dormitory. The fire was intentionally set in the third-floor lounge by students partying in celebration of a big win over a rival basketball team. The building fire alarm had been activated several times that night causing the students to ignore it when the alarm became a real fire. The fire grew very fast and burned very hot, which is typical of fires today, underscoring the importance of having working alarm systems and sprinklers, and especially an escape plan.

The fire was the catalyst for New Jersey enacting the first mandatory residence hall sprinkler law in the nation. “As students go off to college, they should be looking for dorms or student housing that are compliant with life safety codes such as ones that require sprinklers in multi-unit housing,” said Jake Papageorgiou, Fire Marshal with Greenville Fire-Rescue (GFR). “These absolutely save lives!”

Llanos and Simons now travel around the country speaking to high school students, college students, and firefighters. Their goal is to be advocates for fire safety and prevention so that no other students will have to endure the pain they suffered.

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This program is part of GFR's Community Risk Reduction efforts to educate young adults "before they go off to live in college dorms or as they move out of their parent's homes away from mom and dad's watchful eye," said Sylvia R. Peace, Community Risk Reduction Specialist for GFR. "These are potentially lifesaving tools we are placing in their 'adult' toolbox so that when they get their first off-campus apartment or home, they are prepared to look for things that will keep them safe. Things such as working smoke alarms, as well as two exits out of each room," said Peace.

According to Campus Firewatch, there have been 169 fire fatalities in campus communities since January 2000. Alcohol is a contributing factor in more than half of college fire fatalities.

"While the story pulls at one's emotions, this presentation is something that we hope inspires these young adults to incorporate life safety into their daily lives. So many injuries and deaths could be prevented if we took a little time to make a plan and ensure our own safety" said Fire Chief, Jeremy Powell.

Student Council Advisor Kiley Austin worked with Greenville Fire-Rescue to help bring this program to graduating seniors. Students will also receive an "Adulting 101" packet that will include information on personal safety, situational awareness, fire safety, and other life safety topics.

All media are invited to come and hear the presentation. Media RSVPs are required to provide a list to the High School front office staff. Please bring a photo ID along with credentials for your news agency on the day of the event. RSVPs should be made to Sylvia R. Peace via email at <mailto:srodriguez@ci.greenville.tx.us> by Wednesday, February 22 at noon.

It is highly encouraged to view the documentary prior to the event.

Resources:

The following is a link to the documentary (also available for rent or purchase on Amazon.com)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Bu74TNsPc9TpBF9gNiYGuGK1eH38OIA1/view?usp=sharing>

After the Fire Home Page:

<https://www.alvaroandshawn.com/>

Campus Firewatch Home Page:

<http://www.campus-firewatch.com/>